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Driftwood

By Ida Adaline Powell

1. Fiction (America) }

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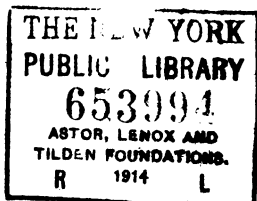
Driftwood

By IDA ADALINE POWELL



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WOMAN
WOMAN
WOMAN

TO MY SISTER,
JESSIE MARGARET CAMPBELL,
WHOSE FAITH HAS
BEEN AN INSPIRATION

THE
GIFT
OF
THE
GODS

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DRIFTWOOD

Driftwood



It was not according to his own wish that he had been retired on a pension. Aware of the same virile strength in his tough old body that he had had at forty, he could see no reason why his services to the road were not as valuable as those of many of the younger men; for his hands were as steady, his eyes as bright, and his back as straight as theirs. One of the causes, however, of a youthful spirit in a body old only in years was a cheerful acquiescence in the decrees of Fate; none of his effectiveness had been wasted in rebellion. So that is how it came about that this sturdy old veteran of the road, Big Jim Martin, as the boys called him, settled down in his tiny cottage, filling his days with womanish tasks, his evenings with pipe, paper, and posies. He kept himself sweet and cheerful through it all, for of such was the nature of his gentle philosophy. It was a busy enough life, but would have been a lonely one, undoubtedly, to this man deprived of the work he loved, had it not been for the human touch lent by the presence of the little old neighbor across the way.

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Every morning he came out upon his porch, directly after breakfast, to sprinkle the plants in his porch-boxes. If she was there, already busy at a similar task, he went back to his breakfast pots and pans, brisk and satisfied, after a few observations and the performance of his pleasant duty. But if she had not yet appeared, every device of a rather slow wit was brought into play to keep him lingering there.

She always appeared sooner or later, with watering pot and pruning shears, coming gayly as to a welcome task. He wondered long why so blithe a beginning should have so doleful an ending. If he lingered until the ministrations were over, he invariably saw a look of gloom settle down on the face meant only for smiles and sweetness, and her unwillingness to return to the house was evident, even to Big Jim's perceptions.

What could it mean? It came to be repeated so often, this little pantomime of self-revelation, that finally he linked it with a small and apparently insignificant incident, and, by one of those leaps for which his womanish work and lonely life may have prepared him, jumped to his own conclusion. His small divinity across the way hated her housework. He saw her step forth one day gayly clad, holding her airy skirts high as

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she crossed the dusty street. Out from beneath her dress peeped a pair of very shabby shoes. From that moment she and the house that sheltered her looked alike to him—jaunty as to exterior, but run down at heel. The luxuries of life were her necessities, the back yard and kitchen might go neglected in favor of the porch-boxes, as the more graceful way of dealing with the situation, while she reached out with tiny, tremulous hands for the fleeting pleasures of life.

His heart went out to her, and this gentle, gruff old knight of the middle class longed to go forth and do battle, for her dear sake, with every smutty pot and pan, every detested hole and corner.

He had already learned that her name was Mrs. Randolph and that she was a Southerner. Now he watched from behind his paper with more personal interest, for he felt that he understood. She looked as though born to receive service by right of her dainty, aristocratic helplessness, and could the bashful man have but seen a way he would have gone forthwith and offered his homage.

They never spoke. She seemed like a queen, with her little fine-lady ways, so different from the practical prudence of the women of his own class. The delightful novelty of an irresponsibility that could

allow her to sit down, in the midst of confusion and untidiness, to devise some airy nothing for her own adornment, attracted him, since his previous experience had led him to suppose that the nice ones all considered cleanliness of supreme importance, and beauty merely secondary, if not an actual temptation and snare.

Of course he planned hundreds of devices for approaching her, but if she so much as looked at him he retired precipitately behind his shelter. It would have been so easy had he but known that this homage paid to her attractiveness was as the breath of life to her. Neither knew of the desire of the other, but little by little both came to live just as much as possible of the bright summer out of doors, each before an audience of one, satisfying the social instinct in this silent fashion.

Only a great pity or a great love can sweep down all barriers of class. Suddenly, one day, without warning came the motive which was needed to spur his unreadiness into action. He saw it all from behind his paper. There was the letter, greeted with a happy flutter of anticipation, the start of surprise, the dead calm of despair.

He rose from his chair, and, with entire absence of self-consciousness, strode manfully across the street. Stopping at the foot

of the steps, he said with gentle gruffness:

"I thought if you didn't mind, I'd straighten out those things in the back yard. I see your man has neglected them."

The state of disrepair of the whole place had weighed rather heavily on his mind, and in this crisis furnished the most natural means of approach. He ignored her helplessness and distress, and assumed her right to command service, with a tact that revealed the true chivalry of his knightly soul.

"Oh, you're so kind!" she said, breathless with her effort to cover all signs of emotion. "Won't you come up and sit down?"

His kindness for the moment obscured her pain, but, when he was seated, nothing loath to take advantage of her graciousness, recollection brought back her trouble, drawing downward the corners of her mouth, and sending big tears to her bright eyes.

"You're so kind," she repeated, "but it will not be of any use now,— to do things to the yard, I mean. I was only living in the house till he could sell it, and now he has."

Her caller gave a sympathetic cluck with his tongue. He had not a very clear idea of the trouble yet; but he had every intention of staying until it was all quite plain. With an air of permanence he settled into a chair.

"It isn't much of a house to feel so badly

about, is it?" she asked. "But with my little income I got along nicely, rent-free as I have been."

"And have you nobody to live with?" he asked.

Months of observation had prepared his mind for this moment. He began to tingle all over. Something was certainly about to happen to him.

"Oh, la, yes suh! Loads of kinfolks! I've lived with them all in turn since Mr. Randolph died, but their lives are quite full without me. I don't mean, of course, that they didn't make me welcome, for they've all been more than kind."

He could very well imagine that her charm had beguiled even the most unready to a graciousness that would leave her with the impression of a balance of credit upon her side; and yet his heart went out to her at the idea of constantly living as a fringe to the fabric of other people's families.

"I tried to be companion to a lady once," she resumed, her mouth going up now in unexpected mirth. "But what you reckon she wanted me to do? I was supposed to arrange for journeys, check baggage and such things, just like a man, when I can't even keep track of my own things if I travel."

Her enjoyment of the incongruity of it

rippled out in irresponsible laughter, and he grinned in sympathy.

"Then a letter came from Cousin Charlie," she resumed, sobering again suddenly, "saying that I could live here. The last of the lovely old things Mr. Randolph and I had were being stored in different barns and attics, and getting them together again was like bringing home a scattered family, though to be sure," she added with childlike honesty, "I don't love to work over them, now I've got them."

A little idea in the background of his mind was beginning to put on definite form.

"And now," she went on, "I've got to go, and be adrift again."

She tried to smile brightly at him, but instead the big tears welled over and fell down the pretty, soft old cheeks.

"My house is big enough for two," he blurted.

It was out now and his heart pumped like a boy's. Suppose she should take offense! She was so absorbed that she did not even comprehend. Drawing a deep breath he tried again. "My house is big enough for two," he repeated.

"Oh!" she breathed, and then again, "oh!" The soft old cheeks flushed prettily. Here was the homage she was used to, the kindness

she hungered for,—perhaps, even, the love she thought was past for her forever.

The soft lips parted in incredulity. He was emboldened by her wonder, in which was no hint of repulse.

“It isn’t so very nice, but it would be yours and it need never be sold.”

“Oh, do you mean it? Are you sure you want me?” She clasped her tiny hands. “You are very kind.”

Kind! And he had been so frightened. She wasn’t sure that he wanted her! He felt like a boy. He wanted to blurt out incoherent words, but could only gulp and seize the gracious, queenly hand she now held out, pressing it in his great, rough paw with painful intensity. It was evidence of her tact, as well as of her hunger for love, that she could be swallowed up thus in his cumbersome adoration, and not wince or even notice how her fingers were being crushed. His reflected joy gladdened and warmed her through and through, while he tingled all over with the thought that this dainty lady might be his to care for, to worship, to protect from the roughness and loneliness of life.

Both hands went out to him in glad, grateful acquiescence in this new and wonderful arrangement.

Standing there hand in hand, irradiated

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by new hope, they tried to realize that Fate was fashioning, out of the apparently useless bits of wreckage from their lives, a new structure, frail and slight, to be sure, but, in their eyes, quite satisfying and perfect.

GOLD IN THE ASHES

Gold in the Ashes

*Youth ended, I shall try
My gain or loss thereby;
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold.*



AS the day drew to a close, the mood that had been possessing Elinor Brooke all day drove her to roaming as restlessly as a girl up and down in her beautiful rooms. She had tried in vain by one little device after another to regain her usual composure; but at last she yielded herself up reluctantly to the thoughts that would pursue her, and took again from her desk the letter which she had thrust there after a first hasty reading. It began without formal address and ended with equal abruptness:

“On my way to New York to catch my steamer for Europe, I am going to stop in Brockton for a few hours. If you prefer not to see me at half-past eight on the night of the fifteenth, I shall accept your servant’s statement that you are not at home, and shall understand.”

It was shorn as bare of embellishments as was her knowledge of his life since their parting. Perhaps it was this lack of picturesqueness, this abrupt simplicity, seeming to indicate in him some characteristics

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which were new to her, which made it possible for her to meet him again. It made the incident appear in the light of a meeting with a new acquaintance, instead of with the man who had slighted her so many years ago, and wrought such havoc to her youth.

As if to make the environment a fitting one, she chose to meet him here, where all things spoke to her of years of quiet, cultured life after the crudities of her early years, where there was nothing that he had ever seen before. Not that she supposed that he would notice. In the years during which she had known him, he was too self-centered to be aware of externals. To her, everything in the place was indicative of her hard-earned poise, and so would be a support to her in their meeting.

When the clock struck the half-hour after eight she rose and faced the door, resting one hand on the back of her chair, hiding the other in a fold of her clinging, soft-hued gown. There was to be no tremulousness in their meeting, only perfect poise and cool self-control. There was not an object in the room that did not reflect her personality—the new one she and circumstance had made for her—and all was in the quiet tone in which the harmony of her life had played itself for years. The room had taken form as had

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her character, and now acted as a physical support, reminding her of the self-possession that she had achieved, the finish of her self-command.

When the door opened she left the fireplace and moved half-way across the room, holding out her hand to greet him without the least sign of perturbation. He was not much changed. She saw it in a moment, but gave no sign. By the widening of his eyes, she knew that he was startled at her transformation, and this assurance was all that she needed to put her entirely at her ease.

All the preliminaries were over, the civil questions and absent answers concerning his voyage, its probable duration, and its more or less indefinite itinerary. Through it, each was reading the other; she unobtrusively, with the appearance of seeing not, as is a woman's way; and he with a man's frank stare. To say he was surprised would hardly convey an impression of his state of mind. The perfecting of this gracious womanhood was not a surprising thing; but he did not know of the years of careful culture required to do it, and the transformation seemed to him little short of miraculous.

In him, the changes, though not so marked, suggested something a little painful. He seemed smaller than she remembered him,

as if with his departed egotism had gone something of his former size. He no longer carried himself as he had, and, altogether, he was a much less imposing figure than he had seemed to her young eyes. In spite of conventional evening garb and an air of being at home in his well-fitting garments, there was a subtle suggestion that life had used him rather badly. He had none of the look of a man worsted in his battle for bread; rather that of the person who has gone through some unshared struggle of the soul. So instantaneous was the impression of something demanding sympathy that Elinor said impulsively:

“Tell me, what has life done to you?”

As soon as the words were spoken, however, her spirit seemed to withdraw again, as though she had stretched a hand to him and as quickly snatched it back.

His quick glance noted this remoteness as it had taken in her delicate charm, as she sat in the big chair with the firelight playing over her soft gown.

“And you,” he said, before replying to her question, “needless to ask what life has brought to you.”

He hesitated, trying to recall the fleeting warmth of her glance. Then, yielding to her will, he settled a little deeper in his chair,

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and fixed his eyes on the fire, withdrawing his attention from anything disconcerting in his present situation.

"Harriet and I lived a peaceful life together for sixteen years in Westbrooke. Last year she died. Our boy is away at boarding-school, and I am on my way to pick him up and take him to Europe with me."

This was evidently only the preface of the story he had come to tell her. Having relieved himself of it, he looked moodily into the fire and began again.

"Harriet was Scotch, you know, with all the Scotch characteristics. Why she ever married me, I do not know. We met at the house of a mutual friend. I was in the hey-day of my belief in myself and my destiny, and I suppose my egotism impressed her at the psychological moment, so that she yielded to the one romantic impulse of her life, and married me. There is no doubt in my mind, now, that the glamour of her father's wealth and importance helped to carry me off my feet."

He seemed determined to spare nothing, though nowhere, from the beginning to the end of his story, could Elinor challenge his delicacy; at no time was she repelled by a feeling that he was consciously appealing to her sympathy.

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"You see," he continued, "I thought there lay before me the chance to do something in the world; and to do myself justice, there was nothing lacking in my enthusiasm, at least. Of course, they made a place for me in the business; but it was not long before I realized that Harriet's father had looked on me from the first with a Scotchman's ready suspicion, and that, as far as my importance in life went, I was a minus quantity. He felt that Harriet had not done so well for herself as he could have done for her; and I am not sure but that gradually she herself grew to be of the same opinion. It dawned upon me, little by little, that what my relation to them was in the beginning, it would remain until the end of the chapter. It seemed to me that, with this realization, I died,—that is, my old self died, the old egotistical, self-centered self,—and I realized exactly what I had done with my life. I had lost your ardent, idealistic love, and had gained the privilege of eating the bread of comfort with people who did not understand, and of being a nonentity while I did it."

Elinor started uneasily; but he did not look up, and she settled into her former immobility, while he pushed on, as though to allow her no time to form an impression.

"I had never loved you. I was incapable

of loving anything except myself; but I knew that neither did I love Harriet. I was guilty of no wrong to her in this thought, for I kept on giving her all that I had ever given, and all that she wanted—the courteous attention of a conventional husband. When a full realization came to me of what I had done to you — and to myself — I took a dogged sort of pleasure in fulfilling to the minutest detail all the obligations of my life; but, in the strict privacy of my own soul, I suffered through my awakened love for you all the pangs I imagined you might have borne on my account. I would not allow myself even the pleasure of inquiring about you.

“It was always a bitter disappointment, which I bore as an acceptable penance, that neither Harriet nor her father ever suspected my ambitions toward the business, any more than they did this inner life I lived with you.”

He paused a moment and glanced at the quiet figure before the fire. She seemed, in her statuesque composure, as remote as she had always been in his dreams of her.

“Five years ago,” he resumed, “her father died, and I awoke. Now, I thought, my chance had come. I had learned so much of the business in those years of silent application that I thought surely I could be of help

to Harriet, who was really now at the head of the great concern. But her grasp on the business was so strong, her knowledge of it so exact, and the organization so complete, that here again I was needed only to fill my little niche. However, interest in the business itself carried me on, and I took pains to learn it from the foundation up, for the pleasure of mastering something. When she died last year, and the first shock of interruption to our well-ordered life had subsided, hope sprang anew in me. Possibly even at forty-three, I might become something more than a follower. All idea of that was soon at an end, however, killed by the conditions of Harriet's will."

He went on more slowly after that, trying evidently to be scrupulously just to the situation.

"It is a marvel that two people could live such a faultlessly conventional life, and never touch each other's souls. I think she had never been conscious of any lack in our relation, and that she honestly never thought she was excluding me from the opportunity I longed for. The property is all left very carefully in trust for the boy, and I have come out of that life without even the satisfaction of some heroic sacrifice, with an ample income, and no impress left behind me."

He had risen at the close of these words, but stood looking into the fire as though he had forgotten her. This task he had set himself was in the nature of a penitential pilgrimage. She understood that he brought his story of pain and defeat, of self-knowledge and relentless self-analysis, as a restitution; and, in the fulfillment of his purpose, she was for the moment as impersonal to him as a saint before whose shrine the pilgrim bows. Her mind had been working rapidly while his story was being told. A little movement on her part recalled her presence to him.

If their parting was to be as unemotional as their meeting, this was the time to let him go; but, as he moved toward her with outstretched hand and an air of finality, Elinor's hand went out involuntarily to detain him. Her voice broke the silence, and there was a note of repressed excitement in her commonplace words:

"You are young yet. Why do you not begin again somewhere else, and put what you know of business affairs with some one else's capital?"

Her repression at the beginning had driven all the color from her face; with these words it flew back to her cheeks almost like the telltale signs of her girlhood.

He was startled at the change in her, and,

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perhaps for the first time, became fully conscious of the woman, apart from the situation. Striving to keep all excitement from his voice, though he thrilled at the intensity of this new idea forming in her mind, he said quietly:

"But where is the place and where is the capital?"

She rose and stood before him, beautifully unconscious of self, in her awakened interest and enthusiasm for this idea.

"The site of the old mill has been waiting for years for somebody with enterprise to use it."

"And the capital?" he asked patiently. He had hurt her too much in the past to show any impatience now with her seeming lack of comprehension.

At the same instant, he knew the thought forming in her mind, and repudiated it sharply before she could speak.

"Not your money!"

"It is not my money," she retorted as sharply. "It was my uncle's. I have never used more than the income from a small portion of it. All the rest has been waiting for my opportunity. Perhaps now it has come. The income that I have used I took as naturally as you should take what has come to you from Harriet. It is the price of our years of service and of growth."

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She spoke his wife's name naturally and linked their years of waiting with a perfect simplicity.

"I've held this sum in trust, because I knew my uncle would have rejoiced to see it used for some purpose. If you lose it, I shall not be destitute. But you will not fail."

She was transformed, as though life had been breathed into a statue; and, looking at her, he knew with certainty that he still held the key to that door which she thought was closed forever. What was behind that door was not romantic love, not what he had sacrificed in their youth and lost forever, but a charity so much more perfect that it could understand all things, and forgive.

He longed for her passionately. Would she give him the one thing that could make this new hope a reality? If he had the courage to dedicate himself to her with the strength of his love and the steadfastness of his soul, would she take what he had to offer? Did he dare?

He hesitated for an instant; then, thrusting his habit of inaction away from him forever, he acted a man's part, and went toward her with eager question in his eyes and demand in his outstretched hands.

THE CONQUEST OF ANNE

The Conquest of Anne



SOCIAL science was a mere name to Anne in the college days — a name that conveyed ideas most interesting and instructive but altogether unconnected with any probable experience of her own. However, she came home with a very fine set of college-made ideas, whose application in the domestic circle was obviously impossible, and in the business world quite unnecessary; so, “mixing up in philanthropy,” as Billy expressed it, was the logical result.

It would have been gratifying, of course, if brother Billy had not taken it as a joke; if Father had not asked after her poor people with the kind of solicitude offered in childhood to her most bedraggled doll; and if Mother had not obviously hoped that she would tire of it and become reconciled to domesticity.

She would not give up, though she was often disappointed at the backsliding of her sinners, the unexpected self-assertion of her most forlorn dependents, and universal ingratitude. There was a kind of fascination in learning some things about human nature

The Conquest of Anne

that the college curriculum failed to reveal and society kept decorously hidden.

So she kept carefully in check the temper that had gradually been subdued, as her hair turned from red to auburn, until it was finally spoken of respectfully as Anne's temperament. She bore derisive comments with apparent equanimity; but a remark that seemed a reflection upon her earnestness of purpose fanned into flames her secret irritation.

Richard Weatherby was the victim; and the occasion was his tactless repetition of an annually recurring proposal, on the very first night of his return from law school.

"Are you ready at last, Nan," said he, "to come and keep house for me?"

Nan wanted her new aims in life to be treated with respect.

"He looked at me, Mother," she explained wrathfully afterward, "just as though he thought four years of college training were designed solely to fit me for the noble calling of making his coffee and mending his socks!"

To poor Richard himself she retorted coldly by asking, "Do you suppose for a moment, Richard Weatherby, that I would make you a good wife? I wouldn't make anybody a good wife in my present state of mind."

"I don't see anything wrong with your

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state of mind," he ventured meekly; but she paid no attention to the interruption.

"What boys of your age want in a wife is some one to adore you, and look up to you,—some one all heart and not too much head. I've no heart at all, and more brain than I seem to have any use for. You men, who know from the first what is to be the application of your years of training, don't know how we girls feel, who have as much brain as you and no especial reason for using it."

She had begun spunkily, like the Nan he had known of old, but ended with dignity and a measure of pathos. This mixture of moods made her seem more attractive than ever.

Richard was rather a simple-minded person in his attitude toward love and marriage. One of the fortunate few who find their divinities early and worship faithfully, if somewhat prosaically, he would have preferred to pay ardent court in simple, primitive fashion, marry early, and settle into peaceful domestic monotony, as other people did. Anne succeeded finally in convincing him of her disapproval of such a commonplace procedure.

There was no subtlety about Richard; but necessity will supply a certain amount of craft to the most simple and direct. Anne's opposition made him obstinate. He was

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determined he would win. Therefore he abandoned the methods that would have been natural and employed a new set of tactics.

He stopped calling her Nan, studiously avoided any references to her work, and devoted himself to Anne's mother. Anne already knew her mother to be strongly favorable to him and her heart failed her. She was secretly afraid of yielding; for observation had taught her a few things about masculine persistence, and she was not quite sure that even her firmness could withstand the forces arrayed against her.

Intuition told her that Richard had not given up; but she could only wait helplessly for the next move. A meek, devoted Richard she could snub; an indifferent Richard she did not understand. She did not know, of course, that he followed her many times at a distance, pretending to himself that he was protecting her from some impending evil. Once in a while he saw the gentle side that Anne usually kept carefully concealed. On these occasions he felt rewarded for his patience, and more hopeful of the future. He could even think without regret of the probable damage to his law practice caused by following wayward Anne.

Three times he ventured to call openly at the settlement house on Anne's afternoon

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in charge. On the third afternoon she suggested that he walk home with her, but they were stopped at the door by a ragged messenger with a tale of woe. A little woman in the next block had a baby in convulsions. Would Miss Harlam get the doctor and come quick herself?

Anne looked depressed but resigned. She turned to dismiss her escort with regret. It might be a long siege and she had had a hard day. Besides, she was approaching one of those crises when she desired nothing so much as rest from usefulness.

Richard had no notion of yielding the ground gained by her unusual affability; so he announced briskly:

"I'm not going home. I'll go along. There may be something I can do, and, anyway, I shall wait and take you home."

"Oh, very well, then, but you won't enjoy yourself," she answered. "I suppose that foolish mother has been feeding her teething baby mushy bananas, or the pot liquor off of greasy cabbage. She will look as round-eyed as an owl, and have about as little sense."

Most of her suppositions were true, though she did not stop to make many inquiries after she arrived. There was quick work to be done, for they dared not wait for the doctor. Anne forgot everything but the exigencies of

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the case. She ordered Richard about in an amazing manner, and he worked with clumsy willingness. As he worked his wonder grew. He had not really supposed that girls did this sort of thing. This was not playing at helping: this was the real thing. His respect grew apace, even while he cringed at the thought of Anne's doing this kind of work. It would not have impressed him as anything surprising to see a woman work just as hard over her own baby; but for a dirty little stranger it was rather disgusting, though very edifying!

The convulsions grew less and less violent, and eventually ceased. The breathing became regular. The child grew quiet. Anne looked limp and tired. In reality, she was neither: she was filled with triumph, for she had impressed Richard and had dominated the situation completely.

Both Anne's zeal and Richard's obstinacy gathered force through this little incident, and it seemed likely that the impetus added to each would carry the two farther and farther from each other's point of view unless something happened quickly to give Richard an advantage.

Upon occasion Anne emerged from her sphere of usefulness, discarded her plain dress in favor of her most becoming gown,

The Conquest of Anne

highest-heeled pair of shoes, and most be-feathered hat, and indulged, as Billy said, in an "orgy of frivolity." The instincts of the suppressed social leader demanded satisfaction. At a bridge party one afternoon one of her fellow-workers in settlement circles mentioned the disagreeable fact that Mrs. McGann was drinking again. The incorrigible Mrs. McGann had promised never, never to drink another drop. The promise, obtained under the pressure of a threat to remove her baby to more wholesome surroundings, had lasted only so long as her pocket was empty. The jingle of her first spare nickels sounded the beginning of the end. A few minutes after Anne heard the sad tidings, Richard and Billy met her going at full speed in the direction of the settlement house.

Billy was skillful in reading Anne's "weather signals." He knew at once from the angle of her hat, and the disregard of her festive gown, that Anne, the social butterfly, was once more suppressed, and Anne, settlement-worker, was in the ascendant.

"Suffering sinners! Which one is it now?" he inquired.

"Mrs. McGann, drinking again, and probably beating poor little Peggy black and blue."

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"And are you going, after dark, to rescue Peggy in that rig, my practical sister?"

Anne swept on without answering, and Billy leaned against the fence to laugh. Richard threw an indignant look at him, and jerked out, as he took a stride after the vanishing figure:

"Laugh, if you want to! I'm going after her. It's getting dark, and there is no knowing what will happen to her if she gets into that neighborhood."

He kept Anne well in sight, but stayed at a discreet distance, an entirely superfluous precaution, since Anne was too absorbed to notice anything until she reached the place where the redoubtable Mrs. McGann abode.

On all sides the other inhabitants were on their "stoops," listening and calling joyous comments to their neighbors. One small boy called out, "She do be at ut again, Miss Anne."

"Where's Peggy?" Anne flung over her shoulder as she sped on, and the boy shrieked back:

"Tommy, he tried to get her out, when she cried, but the owld lady hove a chunk o' coal at 'im,"—a statement which was fully confirmed by a hasty glance at the luckless lad.

Mrs. McGann's only claim to aristocracy was the fact that she lived on the "ghround

The Conquest of Anne

flure." Not even a door-sill impeded the progress of the convivial lady. Anne could reconnoiter with perfect ease at the small window. Sunk on a rickety chair in the middle of the floor was the mountain of flesh that was Mrs. McGann. In the corner was the tiny figure that Anne's eager eyes sought. As if conscious of help at hand, the baby raised her head. Mrs. McGann instantly threw the chunk of coal that she had been holding in her hand. Down went the little head again on the protecting arms.

The child was nearer the door than the woman was. Anne calculated the distance carefully for an instant, then darted through the door and snatched her from the pile of rags that served for a bed. By the time she reached the street, the suddenness of the proceeding had acted upon Mrs. McGann like a dash of cold water, sobering her sufficiently so that she succeeded in getting upon her feet. With a lunge of her huge body she was through the door and after the fugitives.

The weight of her massive bulk kept her on her feet and in a straighter course than one would have thought possible. She seemed to gather momentum at an amazing rate, and bore down threateningly upon the figure with its floating draperies and foolish high-heeled shoes.

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Richard had followed Anne's every move, eagerly awaiting the psychological moment for masculine interference. His blood was beating in his ears, for he felt that his moment was about to arrive.

When Mrs. McGann's intentions became quite evident, Richard raced across the street, seized the baby, tucked her under one arm, and Anne's hand under the other, and fled with them up the street. Anne saw his design in a moment and guided him toward the settlement house, whose dingy protection looked far more alluring, even to a man of action, than an open encounter with Mrs. McGann. Together they plunged up the steps into the dark hall, and locked the door behind them.

Richard leaned against one wall and mopped his brow; Nan propped herself against the other and pressed her hand to her thumping heart. Above them flared a sickly oil lamp; on the floor between them sat the baby, looking first at one, and then at the other, out of big Irish gray eyes.

Almost instantly there came the sound of thunderous footsteps, and a gigantic bellow of Irish epithets was succeeded by blows upon the door, threatening the very stability of the building itself. Anne listened breathlessly, as big-eyed as the baby. Richard

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had begun to enjoy the humor of the situation, and was listening almost as raptly as Anne herself to the picturesque flow of language. All at once it ceased completely, the creature's heavy breathing could be heard distinctly, and then suddenly vituperation was succeeded by piteous appeal.

"For the love of all the saints, Miss, give me some money."

A look of joy overspread Anne's features. She tore at her purse, snatched out a paper dollar, worked it under the loosely hung door, and then listened, breathless, to the sounds of maudlin gratitude and the retreating steps of Mrs. McGann.

When the sound of steps ceased, she slipped to the floor and snatched up Peggy, too weak from excitement and hysterical laughter to stand another moment.

"Well, Nan, do you mind telling me what you did that for?" asked Richard, trying not to show any signs of emotion at the amazing spectacle that he had just witnessed.

"Why, stupid, don't you see? She'll get drunker than ever now and be arrested, and the court will make her give up the baby."

Anne buried her shining head in Peggy's curls, while the little creature's grimy hold upon her dress grew firmer than ever. Richard gasped as the full import of this

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explanation was borne in upon him,— the high-minded, the conscientious, the unimpeachable Anne, would lead a woman into the toils of the police in order to retain her kidnapped child. He was so quiet that Anne looked up. A new expression was growing slowly in Richard's face. Anne smiled a little and then burst into tears.

That was enough for Richard. At the first sign of womanish weakness, the way was clear. A very elemental desire to dominate this woman on the floor had been taking shape in Richard's brain, and he knew that if he never dared to again as long as he lived he was going to tyrannize over her this once.

If he felt any desire to lift Anne to her feet he suppressed it carefully, and, instead, lifted Peggy to his shoulder. Then he said, "Come." It was rather halting, to be sure, but when he tried again it came more easily. Anne's amazed look helped him.

"Come, Anne," he said firmly. "We are going home. And what is more to the point, you are going to marry me, and let me look out for you."

Was she? Anne gasped; but she scrambled to her feet and followed him as he stalked grimly out of the door with Peggy over his shoulder. A little hysterical laugh rose in her throat at the look of his back.

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She remembered that he had reasoned without result, waited for her with faithful meekness, and laid siege with dogged determination; but she had never felt the slightest inclination to yield till she looked up, and caught the characteristic look of the dominant sex.

From the swing of his shoulders she felt sure that the impulse of the cave-man was at work in his brain. He was determined to win—with his will instead of with a club. Was she going to yield or was she not? She rather hoped she was not. Had she not been struggling all winter against the conviction that she would, sooner or later? She tried to harden her heart; but the figure before her, with its look of purposefulness and power, and the tiny burden held so gently in the curve of a strong arm, drew her irresistibly down the steps.

MISS MARY

Miss Mary



MARY ANTON did not love her husband when she married him. John Anton had not asked her to, and had made no pretense of loving her; yet the marriage bore no relation whatever to the usual marriage of convenience.

The match was made by the twins. Mary first became aware of them by overhearing a very animated squabble between them. Out of pity for the helpless nurse, but with no real hope of producing calm, Mary handed each a rose that the children had brought to her that day at school. Their instant response to the diversion — they were quarreling only because they had nothing else to do — gave Mary the first positive feeling of pleasure that she had experienced during the whole wearisome day.

Looking up with elfish animation, the children answered instantly when Mary asked them their names.

"I'm Bob," ventured the more bashful one; and "I'm Bab," proclaimed the girl, with the readiness of a more aggressive personality.

They might, at some future time, develop

Miss Mary

into Robert and Barbara, but the monosyllables were quite appropriate to their present dimensions.

Mary laughed happily. The twins were worth cultivating. Encouraged by her evident appreciation, Bob asked shyly, "What's your name?"

"My name is Miss Mary," she answered.

Some connection between the name and the flowers conveyed an idea to the quick-witted Bab.

"Oh, I know!" said she. "You are 'Mistress Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?'"

"No," laughed Mary, as she passed on, "my garden is only a bricked back yard, where they hang out the wash."

After that she looked for them daily. On Sunday a harassed young father took the nurse's place, and the air seemed more charged with electricity than ever. Bab, who was a capable young person with quite a decided social instinct, achieved something that passed for an introduction. They seemed glad to see her whenever she stopped for a word of greeting, or walked with them for a block or two.

John Anton never made conversation with her, beyond the civilities of the day. In fact, he scarcely appeared to notice her presence,

Miss Mary

except by a relaxation of anxious attention when the children quieted down. His spirit seemed to slip away, for the brief instant of respite from the claims of duty, to some world of grave abstraction. Mary stole occasional glances at him, under cover of his detachment, and wondered who lived with him in this world into which he had withdrawn.

Mary loved all young children, but these two made rather an especial appeal. There was no young mother to superintend the walk. Nurse and father together could not make up for the lack. And, then, Mary had nothing much to think about, except the brick schoolhouse, and the back bedroom, and the yard where they hung up the wash.

One day, at parting, Bab exploded one of her impetuous speeches upon the air.

"We like you, Miss Mary," said she. "Why don't you come and live to our house?"

A sharp glance showed Mary that John Anton was oblivious of the significant question, and she hoped it would not recur. She reckoned, however, without clear knowledge of Miss Bab's perseverance, for she was compelled to turn aside the persistent question, until self-consciousness impelled her to choose a new route for her walks.

Of course she could not forget them, and walking lost most of its charm.

Miss Mary

One day, toward spring, she received a letter from John Anton. It was very brief. It ran:

MY DEAR MISS MARY:

I have been thinking that the twins are right. Could you make up your mind to accept our home and our name, and come and 'live to our house'?

Very truly yours,

JOHN ANTON.

Mary wondered vaguely if he knew her last name, or if he had accepted her as "Miss Mary" as simply as the children had. Then she read the letter again. She thought it a little pathetic in its obvious effort to be perfectly honest, and to offer her only what could be conscientiously given. She liked the tone of it; she was very, very lonely; and a new mission in life looked alluring.

So the twins got their wish. Having shifted his burden to Mary's capable shoulders, John smoothed the pucker out of his forehead, and buried himself in his profession and his memories.

The twins flourished amazingly under Mary's devoted care; while her own nature responded richly to the sweet responsibilities of her adopted motherhood.

Having missed several years of their babyhood, it seemed incredible that they could be out of the circle of her arms and in the school-

Miss Mary

room so soon. When that happened she began to feel, for the first time, the peculiarity of her position.

Once in a while, when Bab wanted to tease, she substituted the old "Miss Mary" for the usual affectionate endearments, and then Mary groaned inwardly. Was she always to be Miss Mary in John Anton's household?

Bob came home one day with his first black eye. Mary was a bit shocked, more than a bit when she found that the battle was about her.

"Well, Mother," he said in extenuation, "the kids said you were only a stepmother, and 'steps' never loved their children like real ones, an' I told him he lied, 'cause you did, an' you do, don't you, Mother?"

She reassured him in the way that was most convincing, and cuddled him as much as his little masculine nature would permit; but when he had gone back to play, feeling much comforted and very manly with his black eye, she went away by herself and cried.

The two years of devotion had brought her rich reward, but they had left her vulnerable at many points. All at once she realized the possibilities of her own nature. She was living only on the edge of happiness, and the natural order of things was quite reversed for her. She, too, might have had

Miss Mary

the satisfaction of commonplace domestic joys, had events occurred with her in the usual order; but, from loving the twins, she had grown into the necessity of being loved, and gradually — though it seemed to her with shocking suddenness — had grown to love John Anton.

She felt as humiliated as though she had suddenly realized herself trying to appropriate something that belonged to some one else; she had not kept to her end of the bargain.

She mustered past events in ruthless review, trying to see how such an unexpected and wholly undesirable thing had come to pass. Probably it had started with her efforts to trace to him many a little characteristic trait that she had watched develop in the children. Certainly she was not jealous of that other mother; but when she could not say, "That is exactly like their father," another love seemed to draw them a little farther away from her absolute right of possession.

Thinking of this other love had made her study her silent husband more closely, and realize more forcibly how small was the part she played in his life; and had made her wonder sadly how many of his thoughts were centered in the fragile, lovely face in the silver frame on his desk.

Miss Mary

It seemed to Mary that some one must notice the difference in her, made by the storm of feeling that had burst over her head. But she had helped to fix upon John Anton the habit of self-absorption. And the twins were happily oblivious.

What was she to do? With the children in school, and more time to think and brood, Mary cried out for something to fill her thoughts. In the early happy days of her life, her father had gathered about him congenial, inspiring men and women. One of these people, the editor of a magazine, had recognized in her some ability that he had tried to develop. But she believed that she had no creative power, and subsequent pressure of loss and poverty had kept dormant whatever gift she had.

Now the new capacity for love and suffering aroused in her the necessity to create, and she tried, secretly and half ashamed. A natural facility had developed, through experience, into real power, which was stimulated to its best expression by a subconscious longing to produce something sufficiently striking to arrest and hold John's attention.

There was a delight in her new occupation that for a time took the place of happiness. She wrote and wrote, feeling sometimes that

what she wrote was worthless, knowing at other times that her work was good.

The winter passed quickly. Complete absorption in the mere act of piling up manuscript satisfied her. She was fascinated by the thought of her own improvement, and was unconscious of any other end in view, until the thought of her old friend, Mr. Arkwright, intruded itself one day. She looked over her manuscript to see what available material she had. Some of the stories seemed rather promising. She would finish one more, and then carry them to Mr. Arkwright.

She had been writing at John's desk, where she felt the inspiration lent by the things that were his, and was spurred to her greatest effort by the face in the frame.

One day she sat finishing the last of her set of stories. It was hard to bring it to a close. She was strangely tired, and kept pausing to hold communion with her own thoughts and the imaginary ones of the other woman. Perhaps she had applied herself too steadily, had taken too little rest and recreation. Every interruption excited her. It was annoying even to have to turn aside faithful old nurse's expostulation at her close application with the half-truth of "work done for him."

Miss Mary

Bob's blustering entry with a request to have a candy-pull, and his joyous "whoop-ee" at her assent left her with a feeling of storm and confusion against which she had to struggle.

Next came Bab with her little feminine plea:

"Mother, I'm asked to Marie's next Saturday. May I go?"

Mary looked up, making a great effort to meet the child's eagerness adequately.

"And may I have a new dress? My old one is so short," went on this insistent little voice.

Mary looked despairingly at the lengthening legs. The child was right. A new white dress would have to be managed, but she must finish her story.

And so the day went by, dragging heavily, because she was trying conscientiously to keep her hand on the household pulse, and yet finish this thing upon which she had set her heart. She had a little superstitious feeling that the events of the day were being enacted before an audience of one, and that she was going to win or lose the approval she coveted.

At last the task was done, and she went in a dreamy state of weariness to the old friend. When she got there, and the work of the long

Miss Mary

winter was put into Mr. Arkwright's hands, reaction set in, and she wished she had not come.

But the kind old editor looked at her over his glasses, after reading one or two stories, and said:

"Ah, yes, my dear, you have certainly matured. Leave these with me; you look as though you need to go home and rest."

She went home, and the next day she could not get up. Between overexertion and tense emotion, she had burned her candle at both ends.

Terrified by the strange look in Mother's face the children ran for Father. He was completely bewildered, for it was the first time in two years that a domestic upheaval had been allowed to touch his aloofness.

Mary lay apparently indifferent to every thing that went on about her, while all the time hot thoughts were sparkling, blazing, and dying down in her brain.

John must not be bothered. He never had been bothered. That was her part of the bargain, the way she had earned her rights in his household.

Where was Bab? How long her legs were growing! She must get up and make her a new white dress.

Presently she became conscious of a pres-

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ence. It seemed to envelop her with a comforting coolness; but when she opened her weary eyes to see what was producing this pleasing effect, she was confronted with something stiff and white that seemed to reach into infinite space. Two cool, strong hands put her firmly back when she started up to convert some of this whiteness into a dress for Bab, and the touch suggested an idea that was even more puzzling than those that had been in possession of her brain. What would they do with a nurse in the house and Mother sick in bed?

Many things must have happened while she was trying to arrange for this domestic crisis. A word or sound started new trains of troubled thought. She did not know that it was good old Nurse's tearful description of the "hours an' hours, Mr. John, that Miss Mary has spent over her writin'," and the resulting questions from a professional looking person over beyond the foot of the bed, that started her to thinking of her stories.

Opening her eyes quickly, she found some one standing by her bed. That was John. No, certainly not! John never looked at her like that; John scarcely ever looked at her at all. That was Brainard in her last story. She remembered, now, that she had made him look just as she had dreamed John would

look if she were the sweet face in the silver frame.

The figure disappeared, and a stranger took its place. A strong, firm hand held hers, and a strong, magnetic look riveted her attention and dragged her wandering thoughts back for a moment from chaos to the realities of things. She did not know that this person was specially ordained to take inspired peeps behind the dropped curtains of peoples' lives; but she knew she had to answer the voice that said, "What have you been doing, Mrs. Anton? And why did you do it? Why have you made yourself ill?"

She did not want him to know, but she told him just the same.

"If I can just do it," she whispered, "if I can just do it, he may notice me and love me."

Then she left them again for her own world of troubled thoughts, neither knowing nor caring that she had left the key to the situation in their hands.

She would certainly have roused to hot defense had she heard the doctor diagnosing the case to John—poor, bewildered John, who was saying, helplessly, "What shall we do?"

"Do?" retorted the doctor. "Why, wait, just as she has been doing for so long."

"Wait for what? Heavens, man, is waiting all we can do?"

Miss Mary

"It is all you can do. There is only one thing that could help her, and," he added thoughtfully in a lower tone, "we can't get her that."

"What is it? I'll get anything you say," urged Anton.

"You? You can't: you're too cold, too old before your time, too dispassionate. There's not a thing that will help her, in my opinion, but for a feeling as intense as her own to reach down into the depths of her suffering. What chance have you, you dried-up lawyer's brief? You have a love there for the asking, and you didn't even know she cared."

"No, I never knew she cared." He did not ask how the doctor knew so much. It was all too astonishing for him to grasp.

The talk went on; but Mary, rendered mercifully oblivious of their discussion, knew nothing of the fact that her future really rested in the hands of this person who had sorted out the facts from the muddle in her brain.

The next time she roused up, Brainard was there again. She put out her hand softly. No, she would not touch him. He might disappear, and she would not be able to bear that. She was convinced that Brainard was going to be a comfort to her.

Miss Mary

He came continually in the days that followed, bringing comfort in the hands that were always warm and strong when she needed support, always cool when the fever burned. She let him do things for her, and thought she was imagining the sweetness of it; but she never touched him, lest he disappear.

She explained to him quite punctiliously, one day, that she could talk to him without being disloyal to John.

"You see, John can't love me. He loves only the sweet face on his desk. I think she must know I love her babies, and I think she wouldn't grudge me a little bit of John. But John doesn't know, and I shall not need it so much, now that I have you. You're going to be such a comfort."

She felt a strong pair of arms about her, and a face very near her own. She had often wished she might put out her hand, and run her fingers through John's hair. It was thick and soft, she knew, for it grew on his head just like Bob's. What if she put out her fingers now, and touched the head that seemed to be so near her own! She thought she would try it. She was half afraid it would disappear, but her hand had tangible evidence of reality, the head went down on her arm, and a voice sounded in her ear:

"Oh, Mary, Mary, love me and get well!"

Miss Mary

Then the nurse stood over her with tears running down her cheeks, and, as she administered some kind of dose that Mary did not want to take, she kept repeating to the frightened man:

"No, no, you've not killed her. She will get well now."

And so she did, just as slowly as she conscientiously could. It was all so sweet, this coming back to a different world, that she prolonged it as much as she could, and John helped her to be quite normal and selfish and happy.

He put into her hands one day her little volume of stories, with much proprietary pride, for he and Mr. Arkwright had entered into a compact to keep the secret while they prepared the stories for the press.

He knew that this would be the consummation of a dream; but he did not know that it was this that gave her courage to go, with her hand in his, to the room where they had been written; nor could he realize all that she felt, when she thought she found in the face in the frame, the coveted look of sympathy and approval.

CLEVER PETER

Clever Peter



RS. AMELIA MORSE stood by the hot stove stirring strawberry preserves. She usually enjoyed the process, because she felt herself mistress of the situation. This morning, however, everything had gone wrong. Towser had stepped on a little chicken and had broken its leg; the chicken had been in the wrong place because Milly had neglected her duty while nursing her own griefs, which could be laid directly at the door of Milly's mother; and now even the preserving was proving a further irritation to her already disturbed spirit.

The seething mass was just on the point of boiling over when a voice at her elbow made her jump, although it brought with it a shock of relief.

"If you will allow me, madam, we shall have the troublesome kettle off in a minute. Just clamp this contrivance on that way, push down like a pump-handle, so; swing the kettle free from the stove eye, so; now, a push and a shove, and there you have it! Loots's Lifter,—seventy-five cents. You'll

take one, madam? Thank you, I believe you'll never regret it."

With one hand on her hip, and the other grasping the peculiar-looking implement that had just borne its part in the demonstration, Amelia Morse stood open-mouthed in amazement, when the flow of words ceased. She closed her mouth with a snap, but opened it again instantly to ejaculate:

"Well, I never! For land o' goodness' sake! This is the first time I ever let an agent git ahead of me in my own kitchen!"

"But, madam, I'm not an agent. I'm an inventor."

The impression, made by his timely intervention, was intensified by his cheerful audacity. In a moment, Mrs. Morse found herself completing a transaction that left her the bewildered possessor of Loots's Lifter.

The young man took up his narrative calmly, at the point where he had made his startling claim to inventive genius. If the listener had any objection to giving him her time, as well as the seventy-five cents, in exchange for what he had to give her, he was quite oblivious of the fact, and rambled cheerfully on, in the friendly manner that seemed to have hypnotized her.

"You see, I was a little shaver when dad died. We had nothing to live on but our

little place just out of town, which had lots of fruit on it, and mother canned and preserved a lot to earn money. It made me ache to see her lift the kettles, she was so little and they were so big; so I made her something like this. After she died, I went to live with an uncle in town. He taught school and nearly starved on his salary. When he asked me if I'd like to fit myself to teach, I declined with thanks, and told him I meant to make some money.

"'But, how, son?'" said he. 'I've been wanting to make money for twenty years. How are you going to do it?'

"Well, the long and the short of it is, we decided that there might be some money in patenting and selling this lifting contrivance of mine. We thought we could make a few, go out and sell them, come back and make more, and finally establish a little business. So that is what we are doing. You can see for yourself that I'm not merely an agent; I am placing my own invention."

No doubt his winning boyishness helped to make his point convincing. His hat was doing duty as a fan, to cool the damp waves of yellow hair that clung to a good forehead. A smile, which began in blue eyes and spread downward in two furrows, obviously made by much indulgence in the gentle art of

Clever Peter

smiling, ended by drawing up the corners of a large, but well-shaped mouth, showing a rather amazing display of white teeth.

Mrs. Morse was plainly fascinated; but she tore herself from the spell that kept her bound and idle on a busy day, and arrayed herself hastily in her accustomed manner.

"Well, now, young man," said she, crisply, "that's very interesting; but it seems to me that a likely young man like you could do something a little more ambitious."

"But, madam," came the quick retort, "just think what I'm getting out of it. I like a bargain as well as a woman — you could tell it from my Pennsylvania Dutch name — and I figure that I'm getting double value for my money. I make a good living and put money in the bank, and at the same time I see the world. I've been in twenty-three states already, and have seen more queer people than you could shake a stick at."

He smiled his pleasant smile. If there was a tinge of significance in it, his mentor had not the sense of humor to see it.

"Well, any way, this ain't preservin'," said she. "By the way, what d'ye say your name is?"

"Loots, ma'am, at your service. Loots's Lifter, we call this thing. Don't you see how good that is? It catches the ear as

Clever Peter

well as the eye — and the kettle,” he added with a grin. “Haven’t you some friend who would like one as a present?”

“Well, I ain’t got time to talk to you any more now. If you go ’round the side o’ the house, you’ll find Milly, prob’ly cryin’ over that broken-legged banty, and you might help her splint it up, you’re so handy. If you’re still hangin’ ’round when I get this stuff into the jars, maybe I’ll buy another.”

Herewith she determinedly turned to her work, not realizing that she had just put a premium on “hangin’ ’round,” and had given ample opportunity to this inquiring youth to add to his queer experiences.

Milly proved to be a round little lass of eighteen. In single-minded concentration of sorrow over the injured fowl, she accepted without question the timely assistance of the handy young man. Not until the leg was neatly and dexterously done up in splints did any question creep into her brown eyes.

In response to the unspoken query, he said: “You see, I’ve just been selling your mother one of my inventions. It works like this,” proceeding to demonstrate on the basket wherein the invalid cheeped mournfully, “and she liked it, and liked me, too, I think. The ladies mostly do,” he added, ingenuously. “She sent me out here to help mend the

chicken, and wait for the preserves to get done, so she can buy some more of them."

The two young people sat down simultaneously on the edge of the porch, and smiled at each other whole-heartedly. Milly's motherly little heart warmed to this lively young person, who made her feel, at once, that he and she had entered into an entertaining game, in which mother was unconsciously involved.

Almost before they realized it, his little life-history was rehearsed, and Milly was unburdening her heart of its small, but poignant, griefs.

"Father wanted me to go to Normal School and learn to teach. I'd just as soon go as a missionary to the Fiji-Islanders," she explained mournfully. "But mother is determined I shall carry out his wishes. If he had lived, he would have known how I hate it, and I wouldn't have had to go."

Peter formed in his own mind a picture of the late Mr. Morse. He had a good imagination, and he had seen Mrs. Morse. He decided promptly that Milly needed a masculine champion. He thought he would not mind adding knight-errantry to his other accomplishments.

When his antagonist in the coming contest appeared at this moment, Peter changed his

expression from one of knightly resolve to one of concentrated interest in the subject of preserves. He laughed; he chatted with a breeziness that must have been refreshing to the woman, who frankly confessed herself "all het up;" he praised the place and her evident management of it; and he finally reached the climax of his audacity.

"I like your place, Mrs. Morse, and I like you. I believe I'll come and stay here, while I am placing my invention in the village."

Thus spoke Peter; and Mrs. Morse replied in characteristic fashion: "Well, for the land o' goodness' sake! Did you ever!"

If she had looked, she would have seen the expression in Milly's eyes, Peter would not have remained, and the ensuing part of the tale would never have been told.

Now began as pretty a little game of love as the village had ever witnessed. It was quite simple and common-place, perhaps; but it had two distinctly new features to satisfy the friendly, but curious, onlookers: the unusualness of Peter, and the unconsciousness of Mrs. 'Melia Morse.

From the first, Peter Loots insisted that Mother Morse was a very jolly person, fond of a joke, and that was why he liked her so much. He kept her so busy living up to this

Clever Peter

new attribute that she entirely overlooked the game he was playing on the side. Of course, he could not stay indefinitely in one small village and keep up his reputation as "an industrious young feller." Soon, all too soon, every family in the village owned a Loots's Lifter, for the love of Peter. But even when he had to seek fresh fields, he saw to it that they lay adjacent to his chosen pasture.

Milly blossomed like the rose. She came to feel herself, as did the village folk, an on-looker in this affair, which really concerned her so closely. She had faith. Peter would do something to save her; he would never let her go to that horrid school. Yet, Peter said nothing against it; he just made subtle love to Milly, and paid flagrant court to Milly's mother.

Naturally, the village soon began to bet on the subject of the ultimate success of the clever young man, and the matter was considered quite important enough for grocery store council.

"That young feller from Ready's Falls, Pennsylvania, is a whizzer, Josh," remarked one city father to his vis-a-vis on the other flour-barrel, "but why in Sam Hill don't he marry that little Milly, stid o' lettin' her ma drive her off to Normal School? Why,

she told my Annie the other day, that as time drew near she nearly died o' fright."

"Yes, I know, Si. She ain't fit to teach school; she's too timid. She told me, that time she substituted over to Hanley, that she had to hang onto her chair when she'd see the big boys comin' in, to keep from runnin' home to her ma."

"What ails Mis' Morse, to want to send her, anyway, d'ye s'pose?" asked Si, querulously, feeling a peevish, but helpless, sympathy for the harassed Milly.

"Why, Si, I'm surprised you ask that question."

Josh replaced his quid, and settled down to an unusual indulgence in a keen, but habitually inarticulate, analytical power.

"Didn't you never hear Hiram Morse say, when Milly was little, that he'd like to have her be a school-teacher? Thought that was the loftiest ambition he could have for her I reckon, and never realized that she was about as well fitted for it as a blue-eyed kitten would be for a watch-dog. When he died and 'Melia couldn't run him any more, wa'n't it quite natcheral that she should hit on somethin' like this, that he had wanted when he was livin', and insist on his havin' it after he's dead?"

Clever Peter

Si was much impressed. They enlarged on the theme. Naturally, Josh believed firmly that 'Melia would have her way; but Si was obstinately loyal to his faith in the cleverness of Peter, and bet his best bushel of corn against the biggest pumpkin of the analytical Josh.

Peter seemed in no hurry to show himself capable of averting Milly's doom. The summer waned. Milly settled once more into impenetrable gloom. All that Peter seemed to have gained was the permission to conduct the victim to the sacrificial altar, which was just forty-three miles distant.

The two friendly old men were of the group of sympathizers who went to the train to see Milly off.

"Why don't that young feller speak out?" groaned Si to Josh.

"Why, you old fool," retorted the complacent reader of character, "don't you know 'Melia wouldn't pay no more attention to a proposal, now, than a runaway engine would to a cow on the track?"

When the travelers appeared, only Milly's tears kept the departure from looking quite bridal, Milly was so daintily clad, and Peter was so debonair. It was almost more than Si could bear; he had had such faith. He shook Peter painfully by the hand.

"Ain't you goin' to do nothin', Peter Loots?" he groaned.

Then, for one instant, Peter relaxed his reticence. He first indulged in a protracted, comprehensive wink. He next allowed the anxious Si two peeps, one of a long, official-looking document, the other of something small and round and golden. Si's jaw dropped.

"What makes her look so solemn then?" said he.

"Lord, man, she don't know it," said young Peter Loots.

On the following morning, Amelia Morse, much troubled in spirit, resorted to preserving. A second time it failed to furnish the solace she had expected. Finally, when a tear fell with a sizzle, she absently used her lifter, and then stood looking at it pensively.

Never before had she felt like this. Even Hiram's death had scarcely weighed on her, as did her present state of quite unnecessary loneliness. In that case, it seemed to be the judgment of Providence and not her own, which was at fault.

If the voice that broke in on her musing was not the cheery one of a former occasion, it brought at least some measure of relief. The owner of the voice was Josh and he eyed her quizzically.

Clever Peter

"Here's a letter for you," he said, "and I reckon it's from Peter."

She snatched it eagerly. Peter had not returned the night before, as he had promised, to report on their trip.

Josh lingered in the vicinity long enough to hear a gasp and see 'Melia drop into a chair. Then, on the strength of pure circumstantial evidence, he went forth to own his defeat to Si.

The letter ran:

DEAR MOTHER:

I'm learning something every day. To-day, I learned how to turn an unwilling school-teacher into a more or less willing wife, with the aid of a ring, a license, and Parson Long of Shelby. Milly's scared. You see she can't realize yet how glad you're going to be that I am your son-in-law, when you get used to it. Milly's crying now, but she will be smiling by the time we get back home two weeks from to-day, and I think you will be too.

Your affectionate son,
PETER LOOTS.

It was a characteristic letter. So was Amelia Morse's comment. She sat staring at the letter for some time and then ejaculated:

"For the land o' goodness' sake! Did you ever?"

THE THIRTY DAYS' SIEGE

The Thirty Days' Siege



ADFORD stood back on the outskirts of the little crowd of friends who had come to bid good-by to his sister and her guests. He felt no inclination to mingle with them. His part in Laura's gay gatherings had always been that of the quiet observer. She had done her demonstrative duty by him the night before, so he was moved to be present at the departure by mere curiosity to see whom his gay little sister had gathered about her, for this trip with Jack in his private car.

There was Mrs. Billy Bowen, of course. She was the object of Laura's latest frenzied friendship. It never seemed to trouble Mrs. Billy any, that Billy had to stay behind and labor for the hard-earned and none too abundant dollars.

It was exactly like Laura, in her desire to think up a new sensation, to insist upon taking along Mr. and Mrs. Peter Sanford for their bridal trip. Probably nothing but Peter's chronic lack of funds would have induced him to agree to enjoy his honeymoon in public. Of course, the presence of the

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bridal couple accounted for the gay mob of young folks thronging the train, bulging out of the windows, and screaming with extravagant pleasure. Above all other sounds soared the laugh of Mrs. Peter Sanford. If he were married to that laugh, thought Radford, he would be tempted to lose Mrs. Peter in the desert.

There were two business friends of Jack's and their rather too well preserved wives, whom Radford did not know.

Jack's young secretary, Burnham, was leaning over the rail of the observation car, as close as he could get to Mrs. Billy. Radford thought Laura a little indiscreet to include both in her party; but then one couldn't be punctilious and old-fashioned in Laura's set.

On second thought, however, he didn't know but one might. His eye caught sight of Marian Craig, standing on the platform, somewhat detached from the little crowd. She would have looked detached if she had been rubbing elbows with them, for she was so different.

She always took her pleasures quietly, as Radford did; but he noticed it more than he had in the corners of Laura's drawing-room, because of her startling contrast with the chattering, screaming crowd. She looked

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reposeful, and, strange as it seemed to Radford, not at all disapproving, but rather well entertained. He had wondered before why Laura had her so much about. There was hardly enough significance in the fact of a schoolgirl devotion, or of sympathy for Marian's loneliness, to account for the emphasis with which his gay, rather shallow little sister insisted upon Marian's presence. The brother had wondered, in his tolerant understanding of his sister's characteristics, if Marian did not appeal to her as a pleasing foil for her own more showy social gifts.

Marian Craig was standing with her profile turned to him, and he was impressed for the first time with the thought that she had really a claim to beauty. The outlines of the head and figure were nobly drawn. The mourning costume, which recalled to Radford the recent loss of her last tie of close kinship, set off her delicate dignity without calling attention to her loss by the vulgar chicness that Radford had sometimes observed in the mourners in Laura's set. He wondered why he had never before noticed that beautiful shell-like tint of skin. He speculated idly as to the color of her eyes.

The train was about to start. Radford pressed a little closer. Unconsciously he

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had riveted his gaze on Marian Craig's face. As the train moved slowly, she turned and her eyes swept the crowd. A little sober look had superseded the sympathetic half-smile with which she had been listening to the foolish chatter. Radford wondered if she were feeling her peculiar loneliness. In an instant her eyes — good gray eyes, looking out, without self-consciousness, from under level brows — looked straight into his, and she smiled with an expression of pleasure that lighted up her whole face. There was one person in the crowd that she knew. Radford was glad that he had come. His hand went to his hat. As though the impulse that had brought the smile to her face had not yet expended itself, she raised her hand quickly from the rail, where it had been resting, and waved a graceful good-by.

Radford nearly forgot to put his hat back, while he stood and watched the train as long as it was in sight. That wave had surprised him more than he remembered ever to have been surprised before in his forty years. As he turned his steps slowly toward the office of Radford & Ward, Architects, he recalled the fact that he had seen her a dozen times at Laura's, had probably spent as many half hours in desultory chats in corners, and had come away with no very distinct impression,

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beyond a feeling of mild pleasure. He had never felt any intense desire to renew the experience.

Laura had said to him once, in one of her chattering confidences: "Marian is a dear, but not the style you men care for."

Radford recalled the statement now, with a little resentment at the implied reflection, either upon Marian Craig or his own sex. Since there seemed nothing amiss with Marian Craig, the fault must lie with masculine discernment. Then, remembering his own indifference, he was more willing to concede the possibility of her lack of power to draw and charm people.

Radford was not an analytical person; but he knew men and women pretty well, and as he walked slowly up State Street he decided that what Marian Craig needed was the magnetism that comes from belief in self and a determination to get what one wants. He could not imagine her putting any effort into those feminine allurements that bring to most of her sex coveted attention. She looked like a person who never selfishly sought, but expended herself lavishly in giving.

That reminded him: had Laura provided a man to play the devoted to Marian? That seemed to be the custom in her set. They could not be happy unless every Jill had her

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Jack; but he failed to recall any Jack for Marian Craig. He was indignant at Laura's thoughtlessness, and pictured to himself just how Marian would be expected to fit in, and take the leavings of other people's fun.

It was especially too bad just now, when Marian was no doubt still feeling the first crushing sadness of her mother's death. He had heard of the loss some weeks before without any overwhelming emotion, but now his heart ached for her sympathetically.

Just then he paused before a very attractive florist's window. He was in no hurry to get back to the office, was in fact feeling a little lazy from the holiday-making spirit he had just witnessed. He was lonely, too. Like Marian Craig he made few close friends. Laura had told him of her beautiful devotion to her mother. In her case it was natural that she should have found no time to make a place in any other home than Laura's since coming to the city. In his own, there was no excuse except indifference.

He supposed she had no intimate friends to send her greetings and gifts. She had not even carried flowers like the other women. If he had known her well enough he might have sent her some. There was no other woman he cared about sending them to.

Inspecting those in the window closely,

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he selected the kind he would prefer to send to her if he knew her well enough. The pink roses were exactly the shade of the pink in her fine, smooth skin. He would like to send her those.

There was a latent streak of romance in Radford. The relaxation of the moment brought it to the surface, and he wondered how it would seem to imagine himself in the relation of an intimate friend, and to send flowers to greet her at the first stop. He had the itinerary with its exact dates for arrivals and departures, and there was that fellow, Waldenheim, in St. Louis, who could be trusted to do the thing right. Why not do it? She needn't know who sent them, though he hoped she would guess.

There was no more loitering along the street. He marched briskly to a telegraph office, and, in a twinkling, the deed was done. Marian Craig would be greeted that night by pink roses when she arrived in St. Louis.

Up to this time, he had not considered her point of view, and he did not feel quite so sure of himself as he shut the door of his office and sat down to open his mail. Then he thought again of the friendly look from a pair of gray eyes under level brows, and of the pleasure she showed at seeing one familiar face in the crowd. He felt relieved.

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She would at least receive them with unaffected friendliness. Of that much he thought he could assure himself.

The next day he walked slowly up State Street again. A very agreeable suggestion had come to him in his unusual lingering the day before. Possibly there was another idea waiting for him somewhere in the crowded throng or behind one of the big plate-glass windows.

The wish that fathered the thought brought the suggestion to his brain quite promptly, straight out of Eastman's window. He would send her something to greet her at New Orleans, and what better gift could he send than a kodak? He was sure she did not have one. For a busy woman like Marian Craig, it would be the last form of self-indulgence to occur to her; but, on a trip of pure pleasure and relaxation like this, she would surely enjoy it.

He had it carefully boxed and sent, and then spent several days of miserable shyness, wondering what she would think, and if she would be displeased.

He made up his mind he wouldn't send her any more expensive things. She wasn't the kind that would like it, anyway, and he'd been a fool to presume. It took him some time to arrive at this conclusion. When it

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was reached, he put away, in the very bottom of his deepest drawer, a very dainty Russia-leather diary with a silver pencil. It had appealed to him when he saw it as looking exactly right for her, but he guessed he'd never send it, after all.

Several days more passed in this depressing frame of mind, and then came a little package to relieve the situation. In it were a dozen pictures of the car and its gay party, in groups of two and three, in various attitudes and situations.

Yes, of course, thought Radford, there were pictures of everybody else. He had not thought when he sent the kodak that it was furnishing her with just one way more of being useful to the others.

A fine state of disgruntlement was succeeding his first pleasure at receiving evidence of her use of his gift, when out of the picture at the very bottom of the lot looked a pair of frank eyes from under level brows, with the expression of pleasure that had lingered with him since she had waved her hand from the train. Out came the diary from its hiding-place, to speed on its way toward El Paso. She was quite evidently entering into the game.

He did not send something of value every day. One day it was only a cutting from

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the paper, with a cartoon and humorous description of Chicago weather in February. Another, it was his own impressions of State Street in a wind storm. He sent them unsigned. He knew she would know from whence they came. He got Bobby, the office boy, to take a snapshot of him one day, sitting at his desk in an attitude of weary toil. In a conspicuous place he had put the twelfth of the pictures she had sent.

When sufficient time had elapsed for him to hear from the diary, he received a big, fat envelope. In it were closely packed sheets, unsigned, in diary form. He felt sure they were duplicates of material that had found its way into the little leather book. Of course he might have known she could write well. Anybody with a brow like that could, but he would hardly have expected so delightfully humorous a style. She had gone back in her memory and filled in the events of each day. The discernment she showed, and the power of reading character, pleased Radford immensely. With a stroke of the pen each member of the party had fallen into his proper place, just such a place as he would have assigned had he her fine sensibility and delicate humor.

Nor had she spared herself. With unerring knowledge of the relation she bore to

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the personnel of the party, but with no touch of bitterness and only a humorous enjoyment, she touched herself off with the rest. Of course she was quite sure by this time who had been sending her the gifts. A mere glimpse of his dutiful letters to Laura would have revealed the truth, even if she had not known from the first. There was a spice of daring about sending subtle thanks in this fashion which appealed to him in his present mood.

From that time he looked forward to every mail, hoping for something more from her. From time to time packets arrived. Part of the pleasure he found in them came from his effort to trace indirect acknowledgment of each of his own communications.

The kodak was made to do duty for several of her responses. He knew that the group of women in light summer dresses with airy sunshades over their uncovered heads was a tantalizing little reminder of the contrast between his situation and hers, brought out by his weather report.

When he sent her several pocket editions of his favorite poems, back came a lyric breathing the warmth of the South, a sonnet evoked by an unusual glimpse into the hearts of the people she had seen, an amusing ballad purporting to depict a ludicrous incident

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that had happened to some one of the party.

He was delighted with her cleverness. He felt like the discoverer of genius. That she had taken all this trouble to please him set his last lingering self-distrust at rest.

One day a picture with only one person in the foreground arrived. She had not sent him her picture alone before, and it brought with it a distinct feeling of relief. He had been transgressing even the liberal bounds he had set himself, and had felt a little uncertain once more. He had been drawn one day into Marshall Field's by the fascinating window display, and had been beguiled into buying a filmy, delicate, fascinating thing which the girl behind the counter assured him was a jabot. The purchase was the result of an impulse to suggest that she might wear something besides black. In this picture she showed that she had understood, and had not resented it.

She was dressed in cool, summery attire, and beneath a frilly parasol her face wore a smile of girlish pleasure. Whether his imagination was playing him false or not, he felt sure that the good gray eyes had lost their impersonal look, and held for him an expression of friendly intimacy.

A sudden desire to go on buying soft,

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feminine, fluffy things for her seized him in its inexorable grip. After struggling in vain with the impulse he sat down and wrote a letter.

They had been making their way back from Mexico for some days, and he was in a panic lest he be too late. However, he had already relied with good results on Jack's itinerary and lists of dates, and besides, he had the comfort of knowing that his brother-in-law had to stop some days in St. Louis to report to fellow share-holders about the Mexican mines.

Radford had always thought of her as Marian Craig, and that is the way he began his letter. Marian was too intimate, Miss Craig so cold that it scared him out of his new-found courage and daring; so he wrote:

MY DEAR MARIAN CRAIG:—

You have not been out of my mind more than a few minutes at a time since you waved your hand to me at the train. That may sound like exaggeration, because you know I am an architect and must earn my living; but if this keeps up there won't be anything left of Radford & Ward, Architects. I shall be unfit for business, and poor Ward will never survive the shock. To save me from a complete financial crash I think you ought to take pity on me and marry me, for I think I must be very much in love, indeed.

I am sending my last gift. I cannot wait until

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you return, because I am afraid I should be quite overcome by my own audacity, and run away when I saw you, unless you wore evidence of your gracious pardon and acceptance.

Yours in respectful devotion,

PAUL RADFORD.

Then he quite gave up trying to do anything at the office, except to occupy his usual chair. He spent most of his time reviewing the events of the past month, trying to recall the impressions that had led him to his last rashness, attempting to experience again the romantic emotion he had felt when he wrote that letter. He could not do it to save his life, and was rather alarmed lest he had overrated his desire. But he finally comforted himself with the thought that he was only stunned by his own precipitancy. Probably he had crowded too much feeling into one short month, and was only experiencing the apathy of reaction, consequent upon his tremendous act of daring.

A telegram from Laura came, after an interminable wait, announcing their probable arrival on the morning of the next day. Not a word from Marian Craig came to show whether or not she had received and accepted his gift.

The next morning, as train time approached, he paused on the outskirts of an-

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other group of people, waiting this time to welcome the party home. It was not so gay as the other party had been, since the bridal couple was an old story now. It was composed chiefly of people who really cared, and was rather quiet and subdued; so it fitted in better with his mood.

At last the train backed in, with its observation car packed with the home-coming group. His eye traveled straight to the spot where she had stood when he saw her last. She was there, in the same attitude, but with a subtle difference. This time she had on a Panama hat and a trim white cloth suit, which made her look slimmer, more youthful, and at the same time more fascinatingly sweet and womanly. She did not seem so much interested in the other members of the party. She stood amongst them with a more assured air than before, but with even greater detachment.

Radford realized these facts with the new power of perception that his recent experience had awakened. He mingled inconspicuously with the crowd, waiting for a special sign.

Leaning a little forward to scan the group of faces, she placed both hands on the shining rail. Something gleamed in the sunshine on the whiteness of her finger. Rad-

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ford stepped back away from the group, and she saw him at last.

The shell pink of her cheeks deepened to a warmer tint, and from the eyes under level brows came a look that Radford had never seen before. Lifting her right hand, she gave the little salute that had turned the tide of events for him, and at the signal Radford reverently lifted his hat.

HIS CHANCE

His Chance



NOTHING but the slip-slop of the horse's feet in the sodden road, the creak of wet leather, or the flap of a loose curtain, broke the stillness of the night. Accustomed to city clatter, Oliver Brant felt as though the silence had soaked him through and through like rain. His big body, that left only one third of the seat to his slight companion, might have been fast asleep, it felt so inert; but his brain, alert as ever, was busy with reminiscences of the past, impressions of the present, conjectures as to the future; and all these thoughts were centred on this same slight figure at his side.

He had become so accustomed to luxurious offices, smooth-rolling limousines, the gentle temperature of hospitals or the pampered air of private homes, that the time, when he and his companion had borne all kinds of hardships together, seemed aeons of time away. Now, Oliver Brant, cast for the roll of city surgeon, and John Strange, playing the part of country practitioner, were as far apart in actual experience, as they were close in their steadfast love. The moment that

had driven them farthest apart had paradoxically bound them closest together.

Of this moment Dr. Brant had never since spoken to his friend. There had been a struggle, ending in the frailer man's decision, that a weak heart would stand the steady strain of long drives and unseasonable calls, better than the sharp crises of the surgeon's life. The pathos of the renunciation had been so near to tragedy that it could not be talked about. It made the stronger man very pitiful and very tender.

They had been enjoying their pipes and a rare hour together, when the imperative summons came, in answer to which they were out so late on this rainy night. Oliver Brant had known from the first that the case had some special significance for his friend. Though the latter showed no other sign of excitement, there was a peculiar quiver of the nostrils and a dilation of the pupils of the eyes that told the tale.

If a momentary hope, that the case would be turned over to him, flitted through the surgeon's mind, it was due only to an unselfish wish to spare his friend. The desire passed in a moment. That quiver of the nostrils spoke of inner excitement that was arousing every faculty, and urging even the much tried heart to do its best. No, the

His Chance

case belonged to the man of slight physique, and small experience, and Dr. Brant felt no foreboding as to the result.

The other's hands closed more firmly on the lines. Old Nell pricked up her ears and jogged on faster, in answer to her master's eagerness. John Strange broke the silence.

"Archie is a fine lad," he said, "I must save him."

Then he plunged into his story without superfluous words. They were never needed between these two.

"Our Scotch minister first told me the history of Old MacKenzie," he began. "The man came years ago from Scotland, working first for daily wages until he saved enough for the little farm. Then he sent for Jeanie. She came to the minister's house and they were married — so long after their courtship that the man was already past his youth, and curly-haired Jeanie's eyes were pathetic with the long wait. But they were happy, and after a while a little boy was born. Archie was loved with the intensity of two strong natures, that still clung to the last of their youth.

"He was a young chap about sixteen when I came here. Before long he confided in me that he wanted to be a great surgeon. He was working hard to help his father and save

a little toward his medical education. That naturally touched a responsive chord. I got into the way of lending him books, of talking to him about cases, of describing my visits to your hospitals and clinics. He succeeded in saving up enough to get one year at college; then somebody took hold and helped.

"During the summer, after his second year of medical college, he had a sharp attack of appendicitis. That was a blow. He knew it probably meant another and another, and then an operation, a long period of inactivity, much expense. He has fought it persistently, though I've begged him again and again to have it over. There has always been too much to do, and too little to do with. I hope he hasn't waited too long."

Dr. Brant understood now why John Strange had always taken such keen interest in operations for appendicitis, why he handled those instruments from Vienna with such loving care, why he had indulged in the apparently useless and rather pathetic hobby of gathering together the latest surgical appliances. He had never told even this intimate friend, that Archie meant to him the perpetuation of his work in the world, the fulfillment of his thwarted ambitions, the warmth of an intimate and immediate interest to his lonely heart. John Strange had

His Chance

always been a reserved man, working out his problems in silence and alone.

Archie was to be his re-incarnation. Archie's body must be made whole as a suitable habitation for the great mind and soul, that John Strange was fitting to do his work in the world. It was easy to see how Archie had gone through college; and easy to tell why John Strange always looked so shabby and lived so plainly.

The elder MacKenzie started up out of the darkness when Nell drew up to the hitching-post in front of the plain little farmhouse. No doubt he had been straining his ears for an indefinite time down the long, black, muddy road. Not a word was said between these men except a murmur of Dr. Brant's name. An absent-minded grip of his hand was all the attention that was accorded the great city surgeon. The father's eyes scarcely left the face of the thin little man at his side, as they strode toward the house. It was plain to be seen how near to worship was the feeling of the elder man for the inconspicuous little country practitioner. Dr. Brant's heart beat faster at the sight of the relation between these people. He wondered if he meant that much to any one of his rich city patrons.

He did not get even so much as a look from

the mother, as she met them at the door, dry-eyed, but wan and pinched with fear. She stretched out both hands and drew Dr. Strange toward the boy's room.

The meeting between boy and man was almost equally undemonstrative, but the transformation in John Strange was complete. As a man might in the presence of his own soul, he dropped all thought of reserve, and his face expressed just what he was feeling. The lad's eyes never left his face, as the examination progressed. They questioned relentlessly, and in answer to their demand John Strange said:

"Yes, boy, I'm sorry you let it go so long. We must get to work."

As he rose from the side of the bed and turned to her, Jeanie MacKenzie led the way into the domain that was hers, the big, beautifully clean kitchen.

Evidently Dr. Strange's confidence in Archie's brain was not misplaced. Even in his suffering the boy's forces had been marshalled to meet the enemy, and the mother had wasted no time in tears.

In the middle of the room were two tables, already placed in suggestive proximity, gallons of sterilized water, rolls of the spotless old linen that the frugal housewife had saved for years.

His Chance

Dr. Strange's eyes lit up. A smile played about his mouth. He was well pleased. Evidently the brain that was to carry on his work was not to be taken by surprise.

The alertness of the boy's mind was an inspiration. With quiet swiftiness everything was made ready in the spotless room. The low-voiced orders of the little doctor were carried out, with instant obedience from the city surgeon and the docile old parents.

Just as the sun topped the horizon they were ready. The crude adequacy of the improvised operating room was a thing of which to be proud; the promise of a brilliant day after the rainy night, an omen for which to be thankful.

Dr. Brant never forgot the picture. The father was sunk into a chair, quite overcome. The mother stood in still anguish, ready to do whatever was required. The doctor paused for an instant to look down upon the quiet, waiting figure, with a look of exaltation on his face. And then the work began.

Dr. Brant always believed that his friend was inspired. There was no hesitation, no fear, no doubt as to the outcome. John Strange handled the case with quiet ease, met every contingency as it arose, with the certainty that might have come from his

thousandth case. Dr. Brant found himself thinking, "The age of miracles need not be over, — if the motive be only strong enough."

The work progressed without a hitch until the last stitch was taken, and the last bandage adjusted. Then John Strange faltered. He stood looking down upon the beautiful young figure, for a moment, as a sculptor might upon his masterpiece, or as a mother might in looking at her little child.

Then he turned to the window, through which was streaming the sunlight of the new day. For a moment he seemed to be struggling for light and air, and then he crumpled into the arms that were stretched out to receive him.

They thought he was gone; but in a moment he opened his eyes, and with a smile that took them all into his confidence, he said:

"I've been waiting — just — for this. At last — I've had — my chance."

It was all over; but as Dr. Brant lifted the slender figure in his arms, there was no room in his thoughts for grief, only for a great thankfulness, that the heart had done its work through the ultimate moment of exaltation and achievement.

THE FRONT WINDOW

The Front Window



O'M, I don't mind telling you about that match, seeing as I was an eyewitness, so to speak, and you a stranger in town. You've got a lot to learn about folks before you feel real well acquainted. Sewing as I do, season after season, in folk's bedrooms, certainly does give me a chance to study the internal workings of family matters. If I was the nosey sort, which I'm thankful to say I'm not, and given to much talking, there wouldn't be any such thing in this town as keeping a secret.

Most people seem to think that, soon's a woman sits down front of a machine, she turns into one, and don't see nor hear nor feel. 'Tisn't so with Miss Patricia. She certainly does treat me with a lot of consideration. She gives me the best window, right in front, which is more than most folks would do, — they'd be so 'fraid I'd take a minute from making over their old clothes. I do like to feel that I can look out once in a while, if I want to, though I seldom do, as I suppose you've noticed.

Oh, no'm, this is all right. A side window

The Front Window

like this does just as well, when you've got a hustling family like the Jenkins's next door.

Well, to go back to Miss Patricia's match. First thing I knew anything serious was going on, I heard Mrs. Francis and the daughter from New Hampshire talking in the hall. There's a bay window at the end of that hall, so that the windows project out beyond the one where I sat, and there they sat and rocked and talked, and never knew that their voices floated right back into my ears. If they didn't want me to hear, they could be more careful. My duty was by that machine, and there I stayed.

I never did have any use for Caroline, anyway. Ever see her? Well, no, I guess she never has been home since you moved here. She married a professor in a college, and is too busy setting the pace for the other professors' wives to come home often. But she always did think she was a leader, Caroline did, and she likes to manage affairs at both ends of the line. I suspect when she's not here she does it by some long-distance, silent-treatment sort of process.

If you could see her you'd know in a minute just what she's like. She has big, round eyes, and a round mouth, the kind that looks well gathered-in and tidy at the corners.

The Front Window

It isn't puckered-up, you understand, or ugly-looking. My gracious, no! She's as pleasant as a basket o'chips; but I've always suspected 'twas partly because no one ever thought of such a thing as opposing her.

Now, Miss Patricia's mouth spreads out good and wide, kind of a generous-minded mouth, I call it; and sometimes it tips up at one corner in a sort of yes-I-understand-you smile.

Guess you'll think from the way I always bring everything back to her that I'm kind o' partial to Miss Patricia, and I guess I am. The way she always sets me down at that front window, and brings me a cup of tea at five o'clock, shows just what she is.

Well, as I was saying, Caroline said to her mother, "Well, Mother, I don't see what better she wants. He's a man in a million, good and steady, prosperous and polite, and he seems devoted to her, in a quiet kind of way."

"Yes, I know, Carrie," her mother answered, "but he appears to be about the only person of her acquaintance who doesn't need her in any particular way. I think sometimes that the way we all depend on her goodness and unselfishness and managing ability has rather gone to her head. She insists upon being useful, and her mission to

The Front Window

humanity doesn't seem to include mere man. Probably if James Brice needed her more he might get her."

I remember just how she said it, because I thought at the time it was clever and true, and showed the difference between Carrie and Carrie's mother. Carrie hasn't enough sense of humor to see anything funny in a situation that she can't manage her way.

She remarked that she didn't see why Patty couldn't be useful and be married, too, and I could just imagine the way her mouth looked when she said it.

Mrs. Francis went on to say:

"Yes, dear, I know, matrimony is a very useful calling, but can it compare for pure altruism with what our Patty has set out to do to-day?" (I looked up that word altruism afterwards, and it does seem to apply to Miss Patricia.)

"Here's her list of duties for the day, as nearly as I can remember. She had a basket for poor old paralyzed Mrs. Hedge. She was going to take the car as far as the end of the line, walk to Mrs. Hedge's with the heavy basket, get some one there to drive her over to the Soldiers' Home with a lot of magazines, and get back to the eleven o'clock car. Then she was to stop at that O'Leary woman's, see if she got over her last drunk, beg her to send

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the children to Sunday School, and see if they had anything in the house to eat. She will probably have to go to the grocery and order some things, which she will undoubtedly pay for out of her own purse, and give up the *matinée* next week.

"She was to stop next at Lou Shepherd's for luncheon. She will be mussed-up and tired, of course, and will have to primp the best she can, with a bit of powder and an extra hairpin, instead of going all fresh and rested as the others will. She will be too tired to enjoy her lunch, but I suppose she will be comforted by the thought of all the good she did between nine o'clock and one. At three she will excuse herself from the really interesting, chatty part of the party, and go to plan with three other women where to have the Sunday School picnic.

"At five she is to meet Anne Ridgeway at the train and bring her here for dinner, you know; and to-night she will have five tables of bridge for Anne's entertainment. Nice, restful day, isn't it?"

I didn't hear any more then; but I certainly did think making new dresses out of scraps was an easy job in comparison.

The next week I went back to finish Miss Patricia's new foulard dress, not having any chance even to try it on that day.

The Front Window

I forgot to tell you that there's another sister, Alice, living in Wyndham, twenty miles from here. She has six children, and, since sister Patty has no cares to tie her down (that's what Alice says), she is very glad to help out with the children. She's just about pulled them all, by twos and threes, through the contagious diseases, and as a special treat Alice lends her one once in a while when it's perfectly well. This week she had little Betty, a cute little trick, five years old.

I had just about got a good start on the hanging of that foulard skirt, with Miss Patricia standing on the piano stool so I needn't bend so far on account of the rheumatism, when in danced Betty with a letter.

Aunt Patricia asked: "Is it for me, dear? Give it to me, and I'll read it while I'm on my pedestal."

"No, indeedy, Auntie, the letter is for me," Betty said. "But you may read it, if you like. Uncle James writes like hen scratches, and I can't read a word."

The cute little midget can't read anyway, but she's too smart to confess it. When she said "Uncle James," I looked at Miss Patricia kind of surprised, for I knew Caroline was Mrs. Ralph, and Alice Mrs. Sam, and I didn't know there was an Uncle James.

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The look on Miss Patricia's face was enough, and it dawned on me who Betty meant. Well, thinks I, you're up-and-coming, Mr. James Brice, if you've already taught Betty to call you Uncle James.

"Little Sweetheart," the letter read, and Betty skipped with pleasure.

"There, now, Auntie," said she, "didn't I tell you? Uncle James wouldn't be callin' you 'Little Sweetheart,' would he?"

Miss Patricia paid no attention, excepting to blush, which I could see even where I was, for the red crept way round behind her ears.

"Little Sweetheart," she went on reading, "I am going with my new little car way out in the country to see a client this afternoon. Will you go with me? You may ask your Aunt Patricia to chaperone you, if you like. I shall be at your door at half-past three."

I didn't see them when they started, though I hurried fast as I could. I was pressing folds in the kitchen, and got to the front window only in time to see a cloud of dust as they turned the corner. You can believe I was on hand when they got back, though. What concerns Miss Patricia concerns me, and I happened to have an extra particular job on hand, between five and five-thirty, that kept me overtime.

When they stopped, Betty flew into the

The Front Window

house to tell Grandma what a fine time she had had, and to show her flowers; so Mr. Brice had a chance to help Miss Patricia out like he wanted to, without any little folks round to bother.

I couldn't blame him for taking so long about it, or looking at her like he did, for she certainly looked sweet in the new blue dimity.

She had taken off her dust coat and stood swinging her little auto-bonnet by the strings, and talking ever so earnestly to him. I was just congratulating myself on how well I'd got the skirt to hang, when I was yanked out of my satisfaction by hearing him say, loud enough to be heard even above the engine that was working away fussily, like some folks do:

"No, of course I don't need you. I've lived thirty-two years, eight months, and sixteen days without you and got on very well. I'm neither lame, nor halt, nor blind, nor a cheerful inebriate like your Mrs. O'Leary. No, I don't need you; but" — and here his voice went down so low and soft I 'most lost it — "I just want you."

And with that he bundled himself post-haste into his machine, and off he went.

I was tingling all over. To tell you the truth, which I'll thank you not to repeat,

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it was the nearest I'd ever come to a proposal, and I declare to you the way his voice softened and all, went all over me so, if it had been me he wanted he could have had me on the spot.

Why, yes, of course, Miss Patricia was struck all of a heap. Wouldn't you have been? She didn't suppose he could spunk up like that any more than I did, I warrant you; and there she stood for a good three minutes, before she turned and went into the house real slow.

For two or three days she reminded me of the fauns you see in the parks, that throw up their heads and look scared when anyone comes near the fence, and, even after the danger is past, will stand with that startled look in their eyes.

Well, the summer went by, and I didn't even see them out with Betty again. I wasn't at the house much more till fall; but when September comes I'm always there a couple of days a week till the fall sewing is done. It takes some time, too, because there are always two or three of the six that get new dresses out of the left overs, before we're through.

It seemed to me Miss Patricia was looking kind of peaked, but it may have been just my imagination. Goodness knows, I'd been

feeling so romantic and foolish, 'twould make you sick, ever since I saw James Brice bundle himself into that machine of his and ride away, and I couldn't wonder at Miss Patricia's taking it to heart. Not being used to the crafty and persistent ways of men-folks, I'd got it into my head that he had given her up, and was feeling real heart-achey for them both.

Men may be queer, and I don't say matrimony's unadulterated joy, according to my observations, but it's a sight better than single-blessedness. I was just turning this over and over in my mind one hot afternoon, trying to decide whether I dared tell Miss Patricia what I thought about it, when all of a sudden, out of a clear sky, so to speak, comes the sound of a machine, and up whirls James Brice with Miss Patricia.

It was all done so quick you couldn't have said Jack Robinson; but I knew something was going to happen or already had, I felt so tingly up my back. Out he jumped and held out both hands, with a look on his face that told the tale. They both ran up on the porch, and spite of craning my neck I couldn't see a thing. Seemed to me having heard him tell her he didn't need her at all, I had a good right to see if he'd found out that he did. But 'twas no use.

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I'd just settled back, and begun sewing in the sleeve of Mrs. Francis's new pongee, when I heard behind me in the hall a soft, fluttery run, and a rustle, and then a kiss. Her mother was sitting in that same friendly disposed window, I told you about once before, and that's how I came to hear the end of the tale.

After that little kiss, I heard the old arm-chair give a creak, as though it was pretty well overloaded, and her mother asked in a kind of smothery voice, like she had her head up against something soft:

"What is it, dear? You look all pink and pleased. Were your sick folks all grateful, and Mrs. O'Leary keeping the pledge?"

"Oh, Mrs. O'Leary!" murmured Miss Patricia. "She seemed likely to drink herself to death, the last I saw of her. I found all my sick folks cross, and ungrateful, and not particularly glad to see me, and the committee didn't work well together, and they all seemed to be opposed to every living thing I proposed, just because I'd proposed it. I had just left them, vowing to myself they could make a mess of everything if they wanted to, and had stopped in at Mrs. O'Leary's, thinking the sight of her improvement and prosperity might cheer me up. But I found all the children in the

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yard, afraid to go in, and Mrs. O'Leary at the front window, with a bottle in her hand, glaring and shouting at me to go home and mind my own business. I went, and I'm not going near her any more.

"When I got about half way home, James, —" she said it softly, as if she was kind of afraid of it — "overtook me in his car. I held my sunshade like a war-club, and my hat was on one side. I know I must have looked funny, but James —" she was getting used to it fast — "helped me in like a queen.

"When I'd got cooled off a bit, he looked at me with a smile in his eyes, and I knew he could pretty nearly have described what kind of an afternoon I had spent. First he looked sorry, or tried to, but then the smile in his eyes crept down to his mouth and he said:

"'Couldn't you make up your mind to stop going so much where you are needed, and come where you're just wanted?'"

The voice stopped here for a few minutes and I didn't hear anything but that overloaded creak of the chair. Then her mother's "Well, dear, what comes next?" brought the answer in a real soft, little voice:

"Well, I just smiled a weepy kind of a smile, and told him if he still wanted me he could have me."

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And that's how I know so much about Miss Patricia's match, thanks to those two front windows and all. I was so excited I sewed the left sleeve into the right armhole so tight it took me a half hour to rip it out; but I never find in that house that they act like I was stealing from them if I make a mistake and have to take it out. Miss Patricia has asked me to come and help her with all her wedding clothes.

MADONNA OF THE BRUSH

Madonna of the Brush



MARGARET CAMERON stood at the window of her studio, looking out upon an expanse of wind-swept ridges and snow-filled hollows. In summer, wide spaces of earth and sky had invariably brought peace; now — such a difference had winter made — she felt a tide of loneliness slowly submerging her.

Turning impatiently from the bleakness outside, she surveyed the room, trying to recall her old feeling for it, to realize why she had ever taken such pleasure in its preparation.

In every detail was evinced appreciation of harmonious colors, skill in arrangement, and consideration for order and comfort. Margaret Cameron was more than an artist: she had all the instincts of a home-maker. The indulgence of her subdued taste in the cheerful hangings, the few good oriental rugs, and the rare pieces of furniture, had given her something of the feeling that she was gathering about her a group of congenial personalities; now, the furnishings merely filled allotted spaces, and failed to evoke any more emotion than do outlived friendships.

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Whatever their surroundings, her canvases would naturally seem very personal and intimate; but they aroused, today, only a feeling of irritation. A frown disturbed the serene smoothness of her forehead as she looked them over critically. There were many of them, but they made no disorder in the room. Even in the feverishness of creation, Margaret Cameron worked in an orderly, dainty way.

There were landscapes of beautiful Normandy, with here and there peasants at work in their poppy-bordered fields; quaint Dutch interiors, with vivid evidences of close-packed family life; warm Italian scenes, in which gay-hearted bambini frolicked under rows of graceful, vine-swung trees. They all showed an appreciative sense of beauty, a delicacy of touch, and a conscientious finish, even if there were no startling evidences of great power or creative genius.

These pictures showed no recent touches, and were hung neatly out of the way. Standing on the easel was a study of the Mother and Child. Near by were others in varying stages of incompleteness, as if each had been thrown aside after serving its turn in an effort to produce one satisfactory conception. The same faces had been in the artist's mind with each attempt: only the expression varied.

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Margaret Cameron sighed and turned away. In the sigh was a recognition of defeat. She had caught only the look of sadness, and none of the exaltation of mother-love.

Tossing aside her brushes and palette she turned again to her inspection of the wintry scene. As she stood leaning against the window, looking sadly out into the snowy world, she made a beautiful picture, herself. Her hair, prematurely whitened at the temples, was drawn gently away from the parting and coiled on her neck, with the softening effect of a madonna's head-dress. The simple lines of her dress revealed soft curves. She was generously planned without being large, an ideal figure to represent the spirit of motherhood.

Today all the dignified lines drooped with defeat. She despised nerves, but feared that she was acquiring a bad case of them. Whether the painting of madonnas was responsible for her insatiable longing for the pressure of tiny arms and the homely demands of husband and children, she did not know. Possibly it had always been there; but only lately had she become fully aware of all that she had missed. An unbearable loneliness was crowding out her satisfaction in building and furnishing the new bungalow,

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the pleasure in the beautiful spot she had chosen for a home, the joy in her art. She supposed she would have to go back to the city life with its demands that were never satisfied, its turmoil that never ceased, its feverishness that consumed her vitality. There, at least, she would be allowed no time for useless regrets. Here, too much solitude seemed likely to prove disastrous.

While she stood looking out and ruthlessly reviewing her situation, the expression of sad introspection suddenly left her face. Her whole figure assumed a listening attitude. Her eyes dilated and seemed looking off at something beyond the range of her physical vision. This lasted only a moment, and then she turned with an air of decision and left the room.

Presently the house-door closed with a decided bang, and Margaret Cameron stepped out into the snow, clad in warm wraps and furs. She set off briskly. It was not a pleasure trip upon which she was bent. She did not look about or pause to choose a direction with deliberation, but immediately took the path that led straight to the north. It was nearly submerged, but she spurned the snow with the feet of an experienced walker, made her way rapidly down the steepest of the little hills, and turned sharply to the

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right at its foot. Here the drifts were piled highest in the nooks where she remembered to have last seen goldenrod and asters. The contrast drove home to her mind with sharp compunction the length of her recent period of self-absorption.

Here and there she found, as she advanced, the snow broken by a single line of masculine footprints, all pointing in a direction opposite the one she was now taking. Stepping in these big depressions, she picked her way unhesitatingly down a wooded slope to a clearing. Involuntarily she hastened and turned an apprehensive face toward the unresponsive cottage just ahead. The only sign of life was a curl of smoke from one small chimney. She paused a moment at the door, then turned the handle and pushed it open without knocking.

Throwing aside her snowy wraps, she called softly, "Mary, Mary Bell!" No answer came. Her heart contracted with a sensation not of fear, but of premonition, that something of serious import was taking place in the room beyond. A little noise, not much louder than the scurry of a frightened mouse, put an end to her indecision. She pushed open the second door and stood looking into the dim interior of the room beyond.

At first she could see nothing, but a little

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scrambling noise made her stoop and lift from the floor a tiny, creeping child. With the baby in her arms, she went rapidly to the window and pushed aside a shabby curtain. The light, thus admitted, showed with ungracious accuracy every detail of the shabby room and its unconscious occupant. Margaret Cameron put the child hurriedly down upon the floor of the outer room, with her soft furs for a plaything. Then she went back to the inner room, closed the door, and turned again to the bed.

Margaret had seen the face of the woman look much like this before; but there was a subtle difference, now, that drove home to her heart a feeling of finality. There should have been a bottle of medicine close at hand. She searched on the rude bureau, on the bed, and on the floor; and at last she found a bottle that had fallen down and rolled under the bed. Her heart sank as she saw that it was almost empty; but she lifted poor Mary Bell's head with a tender strength, and forced the remaining drops between the stiffened lips. Watching closely to see if the woman swallowed, she saw a contraction of the muscles of the throat, and then a faint flutter of the eyelids. In a few moments the eyes opened and the lips parted in a little smile.

"I am so glad — you've come," Mary

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Bell said. "I prayed — you might — before it was — too late." Margaret laid her back on the pillow and knelt by the bed.

"It's surely not so bad as that, Mary Bell. You've pulled through these attacks before."

"Yes, I know," Mary Bell answered, "but it's different this time. I felt it was the end, and sent Benny to the nearest neighbor for help."

Margaret remembered the big footprints that had helped her to get to the cottage. She felt a contraction of the heart with the conviction that even young Benny had recognized the beginning of the end.

Mary's weak voice was gathering strength with her last effort of will.

"Benny has always been a good boy," said Benny's mother, "and has helped me as much as he could since his father died; but he's only a lad, and oh Miss Margaret! what will become of my baby?"

She raised herself on her elbow with her last appeal, but would have fallen back with a groan of pain if Margaret had not caught her. Putting both arms around the fragile figure, and supporting it on her arm, Margaret Cameron looked down at the woman, worn out with the battle, and thought how wonderfully rich she was after all; she had, at least, a treasure to give!

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"Listen, Mary," said Margaret Cameron, "I want a child more than I have ever wanted anything else in my life. Will you give your baby to me?"

The frail, worn-out mother looked up at the strong, womanly face above her, and a look of peace came into her eyes. She was satisfied. With unerring instinct she had recognized the mother-love. Her baby would find a home better than any she could give, and she would find rest. She clasped in both her work-worn hands the free one of Margaret Cameron with a pressure that meant consent, and settled back into the encircling arm in a security wholly new and sweet.

Holding Mary Bell with a forgetfulness of self that made aching muscles of no account, Margaret Cameron studied the face that was slowly taking on a look of peace after pain. She was not afraid to face such a moment, and she saw nothing but beauty in the experience through which she was passing. The woman had lived fully, richly, bravely. Companion to drudgery, bride of poverty, yet she had had all that her life had to give. She had been the wife of a good man and the mother of beautiful children. She had met suffering with patience, and trouble with fortitude; and now she was greeting the messenger of release with resignation.

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Resting on the strong arms that held her so tenderly, Mary Bell lay till her suffering was over. Then Margaret laid her gently back on the bed, and stood looking down on the peaceful face. It looked at last as she had wanted her madonna's face to look. Margaret felt that her presence had brought this happy ending to a hard life, and that she had been a witness and a participant in a miracle. Something of Mary Bell's high courage had come to rest in her own heart. At last she, too, was endowed with motherhood.

Benny brought the neighbors. They were all poor, all had their own troubles and expenses; yet they would do the best they could with the sorrow that had come among them.

There is always a place among such as these for a brisk lad like Benny, but they looked doubtfully at the little baby girl, still busy and unconsciously happy on the floor with Margaret's furs.

Margaret saw the dubious look and caught the baby to her breast with a jealous sweep. There was no need of explanation. A look of general relief broke over their friendly, careworn faces. The fate of the baby girl settled, the boy's life would arrange itself simply and naturally.

Leaving generous material help behind and

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promises of more assistance for the morrow, Margaret wrapped her baby up with tender care and went back the way she had come, toward the house that would now be a home. The snow did not hamper her footsteps, the winds that buffeted her were unfelt. Her heart was glowing warm with the burden held so close; the wings of a new hope bore her up. Upon her had fallen the mantle of motherhood and quietness of spirit; in her face was the expression she had tried in vain to paint,—the exaltation, as well as the sadness, of maternity.

THE OTHER LITTLE GOD

The Other Little God



RS. STANWOOD was giving a house-party. It has little interest for the reader beyond the fact that all but two of her guests had been reduced to a state of settled gloom by a constant downpour of rain, and these two guests, who might have saved the situation, sat about in corners and devoted themselves to each other.

Remarkable engineering feats in vast tracts of wilderness make a name for a man, but they do not tend to adorn him with small social graces and perceptions. To do him justice, Robert Graham was quite oblivious of the fact that he was a lion at all, or that, being a lion, he was supposed to roar.

Jean Langton knew very well what was expected of her. Between pity for her hostess, which prompted her to lend a hand, and an impulse to continue sitting demurely in a corner letting herself be entertained, she was getting a little mixed in her emotions. Therefore she was moved to try to communicate a bit of her secret discomfort to her complacent companion.

"Don't you think," she said, breaking into

The Other Little God

the middle of a sentence, "that we are very selfish, enjoying ourselves like this, when these people expect us to be interesting?"

"What do they want us to do?" Graham asked, a little startled at being torn from his topic.

"Oh, anything to justify our reputations and our invitations."

"Well, you tell me what to do, and I'll do it. Didn't know we were expected to perform," he said bluntly.

"What then did you think you were asked down here for? Didn't you know that every one of these people was told, 'Oh, yes, you'll meet Robert Graham, you know, *the* Robert Graham, who built that impossible bridge, somewhere or other?'"

Her imitation of their flabby, indefinite hostess was perfect. It evoked a big laugh and the quick retort:

"And they were told, also, 'Oh, yes, you will meet the clever short-story writer, Jean Langton.' That, by the way," he added, "is what brought me here, now I come to think of it. I never saw a woman before, at close range, who wrote things, and I thought I might like to see what they are like, since I had nothing important on hand."

"How charming of you!" She crinkled up her eyes at him, with the fleeting mirth that

The Other Little God

made her look very girlish at times in spite of her thirty-four years.

"And now that you've seen the species —?"

She broke off, realizing that she had dropped away from their duty to their hostess into the personalities, where she had found herself, without her own volition, a dozen times in the last few days. Unused to yielding to sudden impulses, and quite accustomed to keeping the conversational reins in her own hands, she could not understand how they found themselves so often in the little intimacies of old acquaintanceship. With his quizzical, friendly smile, and his sudden tricks of speech, he had made her forget her sedateness. She felt as she did in her first season, when tête-à-têtes in corners had seemed quite a matter of course.

"Now that I've seen it," he replied to her unfinished question, "I think it looks very much like any other girl."

"Girl!" she scoffed. "Blind masculine person that you are. It is years since any one has called me that."

"Well, aren't you? You look it anyway," he said, leaning forward to study her with calm appreciation.

"Oh, I see," she returned with conviction. "It's my dress. It is lovely, isn't it?"

The Other Little God

"Very," he agreed, but he was not looking at the gown.

"Now that shows how easily a man can be deceived," she went on briskly, not quite sure where these remarks of his were leading. "If you are coming out of your wilderness to settle down among people,—especially women," she added significantly, "—you'll have to be instructed for your own protection. Take the matter of dress. This gown, for instance, was designed by a French modiste whose strong point is her ability to make her patrons look quite ten years younger than they really are.

"One day I picked up a moth, still moist from the cocoon, with the loveliest combination of colors that I ever saw in its wings. I was on my way to a fitting, and when I showed it to Madame, she went into ecstasies over 'ze lufly color scheme.' She proceeded to transform me into a moth, you see. I wonder if I shall singe my wings," she added softly.

Graham picked up her little fan. Here, too, in exquisite design, was painted the lovely color scheme. The tiny thing, unfurled, resolved itself into a moth, looking too real and delicate for service. She watched it in fascination. It seemed very little, indeed, in his great, brown, capable hands.

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The conviction was growing in her mind that this man was exerting over her some unusual power. She was not sure she liked it, but she could not seem to help it.

"Well, tell me," he said, with one of his sudden changes of subject, "what did you come down here for?"

"To be really polite," she mocked him, "I ought to say that I came to meet you. But to tell you the truth," she added, losing some of her vivacity, and looking suddenly tired, "I had just finished a story and was in one of my vile moods. You would never make a mistake again about my age if you ever saw me just after one of them is done."

It was getting uncanny, the way he drew her back to conversation that was saved from banality only by the power of his personality.

"Well, tell me, how do you write a story," he insisted, "and what's that got to do with coming down here?"

"I'll try to tell you," she said, settling back. "I never know just how one begins. First I feel restless or dreamy. Presently an idea begins to take shape. My mind is in rather a chaotic state at first, but gradually the ideas get themselves sorted out, somehow, and put upon paper. I begin to wax enthusiastic, and care for nothing else."

The Other Little God

Then I work faster and faster until the story has taken form, roughly, ready to be re-worked, smoothed down, finished off. By that time I've begun to hate it, but I can't leave it alone. When it is done I am limp and disgusted, and descend into the very depths of depression."

"Well, what then?" he urged.

"Why, then some poor editor pays me for it and publishes it. It seems like trash to me and I never look at it again, if I can help it. It was in this horrid state of reaction that I came down here — and you've made me forget it," she added involuntarily.

Then she bit her lip and regretted her words, for he leaned forward eagerly and demanded:

"Do you mean that? And do you like to forget it?"

"Why, of course," she conceded. "Moods are rarely pleasant, are they?"

"Never have them. If I feel anything like that coming on, I get out and dig."

"Well, I can't do that. And I'll confess to you, if you won't tell on me, that I positively suffer from these spells of depression."

"Do you know what I think you need?" he asked slowly.

The something that she felt she had let herself in for was coming. She leaned back

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in her chair and waited tensely, feeling powerless to divert it.

The little fan snapped in his hands, and she jumped nervously.

"I think," he said slowly, looking absently at the ruin he had wrought in his earnestness, "I think you need some one to make you always forget your moods,— and I think I'll apply for the job."

II

In spite of Jean's hesitancy they were married in four months. Robert Graham could not be made to see that such precipitancy involved risk; but Jean was frankly afraid. Most of the great emotional experiences had passed her by, through force of circumstance and an innate feminine conservatism amounting to timidity. The ability to write about them sprang from an unusually active imagination and a rarely sympathetic intuition. A conviction that she was different from other women made her think that she would soon be struggling beyond her depth if she ventured into the stream of ordinary human lives; and an active conscience conjured visions, for Graham's benefit, of the probable results of their romantic haste.

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"You will certainly wonder why you married me when the writing fever attacks me again. I shall sit up so late at night, writing, that I shall forget to get up in the morning; I shall pay no attention to your buttons; I shall probably even forget your very existence, and that will hurt your pride."

"I believe Katie makes the coffee, doesn't she?" he asked slyly. "As to buttons, I can show you how to sew them on, probably, better than you know now. And I will treat my pride as I would quicksand in excavating, as something dangerous that must be conquered. No, dear, it's neither coffee nor buttons I'm marrying you for; and I'll see that you don't forget me altogether."

"We shall certainly repent at leisure," she insisted; but he refused to be impressed.

"What shall we repent of?" he asked. "If we get tired of each other you can retire to your study, and I can go and build a bridge."

Robert Graham laid very little stress on the characteristics that she thought made her different. She seemed to him to have erected a shrine to some fearful little god — her temperament or her genius — and to be sacrificing to it the normal happiness of a woman's life. He intended to try the sal-

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utary effect of another little god, one with a sweet, confident smile, and wings on his little shoulders.

So he encouraged Jean to arrange everything for a wedding, "just like other girls," as he insisted on calling her. Having yielded to the stronger will, Jean really began to enjoy her romantic marriage. She loved the beauty of life that comes from established order, and had had plenty of it about her in the home where she had lived alone with her faithful Katie for ten years. Here she had a charming wedding, and then they started upon a long, rambling wedding trip.

Robert Graham seemed destined to make a much more tender and thoughtful husband than his abrupt method of wooing had given his wife any reason to expect. He was much pleased with this new business of matrimony, and as intent upon convincing Jean of his point of view as he had ever been upon the successful consummation of a business project. Therefore he set all the forces of an active mind and an aggressive personality to the accomplishment of his purpose, which was to convince his wife that she was just like other women.

It was his business in life to overcome difficulties, and he had never before had such a prize at stake. It only added to his zest to

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know that the game began instead of ending with the marriage ceremony.

Having once committed herself to a reckless course, Jean entered with a will into all his plans for her pleasure. Graham was delighted. He felt sure that she was becoming convinced that her writing need not cut her off from normal experiences any more than did his bridges.

At first they went to such conventional romantic haunts as would add a quiet glamour to her enjoyment; but, elated by his apparent success, his caution was lulled to sleep, and the daring in him awoke. He began to feel tempted to put her to a test.

Wildernesses were his especial joy, but he knew that they would be a hard test to a person subject to moods. And yet he was tempted to try a longer flight and new sensations.

They sped across vast plains, through the depths of forests, over dizzy trestles, up, up into the sky, and down again, and then onward toward the western sea. She had never experienced such altitudes before, and they wrenched her from her feeling of peace and security. She began to be restless. Then she began to long for home, and with the longing came thoughts of her work. She was impressed as she had never been before

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with the vast distance that separated her world and his. She was terrified with the thought that some day he might ask her to go into some wilderness with him and share its discomforts and privations. The sleeping doubts were all astir again.

One day when the feeling of oppression had grown quite unbearable, she slipped her hand into her husband's, as they sat together looking from the car window into what appeared a bottomless abyss below.

"I am afraid, Robert," she said in explanation of a rather unusual demonstration.

"Evidently not afraid of me," he smiled, giving the hand a reassuring grip. "What then?"

"Of myself, Robert. Presently all the old feelings are going to be awake in me, and I shall not care about anything but writing, making these creatures in my brain take shape."

"And what will you do then? Are you going to hate me for carrying you off?"

"Oh no," she said with a rueful smile. "Probably I shall just forget all about you."

His eyes were very sober, for he knew she was in earnest; but he smiled reassuringly and squeezed her hand.

"You needn't fret, dear," he said. "I

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may go into my wilderness, alone, some day, too."

Then she was happy again for a little while, for his sanity and strength were very reassuring. Gradually, however, she began to feel that he was watching her, and when she kept up her vivacity and responsiveness it was with an effort. She was not used to being watched, and she found herself half resenting it. After awhile she began to lose her sparkle, to grow a little absent-minded, to look less youthfully elated with new scenes. She was even moody at times, and secretly irritated at the thought that he had been putting her to a test.

Unused to being followed into the tangled mazes of her moods, the very thought that he was reading her mind and trying to help her with his tact made her almost forget the sweetness of the new relation.

The wilderness had not proved a success. Both felt relieved when they were out of it. Jean was unhappy because she could no longer be moody without affecting some one else; Graham was chagrined because he had failed to make her forget her moods.

One morning they were breakfasting in a hotel overlooking the ocean. Jean sat with her chin on her hand, her breakfast untasted, gazing out upon the surging water

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that seemed to increase her own turbulent unrest.

Graham was sorting and opening his mail. An exclamation from him made Jean look up quickly, as he pushed a business-like looking letter over to her. When she understood it she looked up with suspicion in her eyes. This summons home was too well-timed to be merely a coincidence. It seemed another evidence of his watchful tact.

Graham fixed his eyes discreetly on his other mail. He had the faculty, when expediency suggested it, of appearing completely detached from his surroundings. He merely asked in a regretful tone, "Are you going to mind going home at once?" and failed to comment on the tone in which she said, "Oh no, not at all."

Her heart gave a throb of joy at the thought. Home, the old surroundings, the old desk, the old work! She knew what the summons must mean to Graham. Some new project was probably on foot. She wondered if his pulse quickened at the thought as hers did at the mere suggestion of home.

This meant a long parting, but in the whirl of thoughts set in motion in Jean's mind, there was scarcely room for regret. Jean had no intention of following her husband into his wilderness.

III

Jean plunged into a story as soon as they returned. Graham set about the business of preparing for a long absence. There was another difficult bridge to be constructed somewhere in South America. That was all that penetrated Jean's absorption at first.

On the surface everything seemed quite easy and natural. Underneath was a current of uneasiness, but it was not expressed by any one but faithful Katie. Untrained in concealing her feelings, she went about with all her distress for Graham and her impatience with her dear Miss Jean written plainly on her face. The situation was inexplicable to her simple intelligence. At last she put her trouble into words.

"Miss Jean don't seem to take no interest in your goin', at all, at all, Mr. Robert."

Graham replied, "Don't worry, Katie, just wait."

Katie looked at him keenly, and a look of relief came to her face. There was something in Graham's confidence that set her mind at rest. Irish ditties once more filled the kitchen.

Jean had not been at ease, either. The usual process of her story-writing was carried out to all appearances, much as she had de-

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scribed it to Graham when they first met; but counter-currents ran at variance with her concentration. She could not completely shut them out; and yet she would not yield.

The story was done and sent away before Graham's preparations were completed. Katie had prayed heartily that it might be, and she was ready with plans that were the outcome of intuition and warm Celtic sympathy rather than any clear psychological process. She had saved all kinds of domestic problems for Miss Jean to solve. She was quite capable of attending to them all herself; but they were to be her antidote for the "story-writin'."

As soon as the story was sent to the post, Jean was confronted by homely household details that left her no time for dissatisfaction until Katie announced at five o'clock, "There's tea and a fire in the library, Miss Jean."

She found herself seated with a tray at her right hand, an artfully disposed work basket at her left, and the open fire to dream over cozily. As she sat and brooded, with a bit of delicate work in her hand, her annoyance with the story returned in full force.

Something of her recent experiences had naturally crept into it. She could not prevent it; nor could she make the story turn

out as she desired. Her central figure, with feminine perversity, refused to act in accordance with her own theories. She was almost tempted to recall the story and change it. She was really out of patience that she had allowed the girl to subordinate her own plans to the more aggressive ones of her husband.

With sudden distaste for femininity, she threw aside the flimsy bit of work, losing her momentary pleasure in its delicacy. She would find something sturdier to take the "eternal feminine" taste out of everything. Tossing things about she fell greedily upon something rough and dark. It proved to be one of Robert's socks. She had never darned one of them. Probably Robert had continued his extravagant bachelor habits of throwing them away. She did not know. She had never thought to ask. Katie's artfulness was quite unsuspected.

Slipping the sock over her darning ball, she realized with a little glow of pleasure that she had not quite forgotten her mother's early lessons. There was something soothing in the homely task. She must ask Katie to leave Robert's mending for her after this. And then the little feeling died out with the thought that Robert was going away and would not need to have her mend for him.

She wondered what the men did for com-

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forts in those outlandish places where Robert went. And how would a woman, delicate and fastidious, ever manage? Surely she had been wise not even to consider going. She must really recall her story and change that other woman's mind.

She thought again with some satisfaction of the theories that she had freely expressed to Robert: each was to have his own especial work that would not interfere with the other's freedom, and when it was done they were to enjoy what remained of their lives together.

On second thought, however, she did not extract quite so much satisfaction from the theory. It occurred to her that her work was done, temporarily at least, and Robert was just starting off to do his, leaving her behind. It was just possible that she might find it hard to do without him.

The task that she had been enjoying had rather detached her from the point of view of Jean Langton, the writer, and as she folded up one pair of socks after another, she felt more and more like Robert Graham's wife, with a long period of loneliness ahead of her. She had not intended that such a feeling should intrude itself. There were to have been no heartaches when the time came for his departure.

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She stirred restlessly. Katie appeared to carry out the tray. In her hand was a letter.

"It came, Miss Jean, this afternoon, when you were very busy, and then I forgot it," she explained.

One would almost suppose that Katie had waited for the psychological moment, but there was a limit even to Katie's astuteness.

Jean had not failed to realize that the day of her husband's departure was very near. The writing had not succeeded in rendering her completely oblivious. Now, up from some subconscious depths, appeared bits of data that she was scarcely aware she possessed. Among them was something she had heard as in a dream about waiting for a letter. With a cold feeling of premonition she took the letter and stared at it. If she had only listened a little more carefully to the remarks Robert occasionally dropped about his trip, the business address on the envelope might convey some intelligible information to her mind. But it did not. Buried deep in her own little affairs, she had heard only faint echoes concerning her husband's great work.

His great work! That was really a new thought. It was a great work, and for the moment hers seemed very small—just writing little tales for the pleasure of other little people. The big work of the world could go

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on just as well without her. Robert had left her, as a matter of course, out of his plans. They were not to be dependent on each other. If they had been, what would have become of their freedom? It was just as she had wished; but her heart ached nevertheless.

It was appalling, now that she came to think of it, the way she had robbed herself of the last days of Robert's stay. And it had given her small satisfaction, after all. The stories were never any particular pleasure to her after they were done. She remembered telling Robert so, before they were married. She had made an unusually big sacrifice to that horrid little god.

By the time she had reached this conclusion she was walking restlessly about the room. The clock struck six. She watched the hands and listened for his footsteps. She could scarcely wait for him to come. She wanted to ask his forgiveness. Then she caught her breath. What did that imply? Nothing more, surely, than that she realized her own discourtesy and neglect. She had no intention of implying any change of attitude toward his work and hers — each to have his own work, and after it was over, their life together. It sounded a little dreary now. She had not fully realized how far

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away his work would carry him. She thought with a shiver of the house without his presence.

If Robert would only come, no doubt he would restore her poise. But if she had already learned to depend on him like that, who would restore her poise while he was in South America?

As quick heel-taps approached the house, she listened, with her heart in her throat. As they passed, it sank again with a sickening sensation. At last came the rapid, regular, forceful steps that she knew were his. With the sound the turmoil in her heart ceased.

She did not know what she meant to say, but she intended to be quite composed. As the door opened, however, she flew at the figure in the big overcoat that stood blocking up the doorway without a word. In a moment she heard her own voice saying from the depths of a pair of woolly arms:

"Robert, you shall not go without me. You will have to take me, too."

Robert Graham tipped his wife's head back, and looked long and searchingly into her flushed face and troubled eyes. Then, as if satisfied, he hugged her close, and whispered in her ear:

"Yes, dear, I thought you'd go. I bought the tickets this morning."

WHEN PATHS DIVIDE

When Paths Divide



MARTHA RIPLEY sat exactly where fat, friendly Elsa had found her when she had come two hours before to announce *einen Brief für die gnädige Frau*. The letter was still in Martha's hand, and Elsa looked at it with sharp suspicion, as she went about her task of making the orderly room more orderly for the long evening that was already shutting down.

At any other time Martha Ripley would have followed the woman's movements with interest as she assured herself that both sets of windows were shut against any possible inrush of fresh air, peered into the pitchers and huge bowls that sat sociably side by side on the antiquated washstand, and did things to the fat little beds that made them look more than ever like purse, self-important burghers.

No smile crossed the mother's face at the recollection of the nightly frolic she and Hilda enjoyed, when they disrobed the overburdened beds and disposed feathery billows about the room.

She and Hilda had really had a very good

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time together, these few full German weeks. Somehow they seemed to belong to each other more than they did at home. Martha Ripley found the girl, who had been so recently a baby in the mother's eyes, and was now so astonishingly near being a woman, less elusive since the two were more dependent upon each other for companionship. In adapting herself to the new life, Martha had renewed her youth and her power of enjoyment.

Elsa missed the usual broken phrases that served Martha Ripley for conversation and evoked much frank enjoyment. *Die gnädige Frau* must be in very low spirits. Elsa eyed the letter disapprovingly. She lingered as long as she could find excuse, and then went out, not surprised at receiving no reply to her courteous *gute Nacht*.

Hilda had not yet returned from her music lesson. Her mother could not bear to have her come, and yet longed inexpressibly for the child's presence. She had sat for two hours in motionless silence; now she was beginning to feel an overwhelming desire, such as she had not experienced in many years, to talk out her trouble. She had almost ceased to feel the necessity of this outlet to her feelings in the years with David. Soon after their marriage she learned the possibility of self-repression, as David relapsed into

his original undemonstrativeness. The passionateness with which he had wooed her changed into the deadly earnestness with which he sought the uncertain dollars. Toward all things emotional he developed a baffling inarticulateness, to which she tried so hard to accustom herself that it became with her, too, a sort of second nature. David did not cease to love her; he only ceased to be in love, a distinction quite clear to the feminine mind. Toward her husband she grew gradually to show a quiet, tolerant indifference that was but a reflection of his own manner. She learned to demand nothing and to impose no onerous obligations. Underneath it all, her heart yearned over him and loved him as passionately as ever.

One can not be demonstrative all alone. Martha had given up hoping to change David, but had tried — in vain — to mould her little girl into the image of her own young self. A silent David she could bear, but a girl baby should be fashioned after her own yearning heart.

Thoughts of her emotional experiences of the past years had thronged her mind thus, in painful disarray, for two hours, rather to her own surprise. In the effort toward temperamental adjustment, she had almost ceased an early habit of introspection. Even

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now, her thoughts were not reflected in face or attitude, as she sat, perfectly motionless and outwardly calm, waiting for Hilda to return.

A little spasm crossed her face at last at the thought of the difference that would be made now in Hilda's life. Again the longing came to her to have the girl as demonstrative as she would have been at the same age, that it might be easier to blurt out her discomfiting news. She wanted Hilda to question and exclaim, and at last join her in a flood of comforting tears.

Tears were not very far from the surface with Martha Ripley now. She felt them scalding back of her eyes and tightening the muscles of her throat; but they did not fall, nor did she expect them to fall after Hilda's arrival. She intended to tell her news as calmly as she had sat there this afternoon; but the tears that were not intended to fall had begun in her heart as soon as she had seen the beginning of David's letter. It did not open with his usual sober "Dear Martha," but ran:

MY WIFE:—

Things have been going badly here for some time, even before you left for Germany. I did not tell you because I hoped I could pull through. Now I know I can't; but the money for you and

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our little girl for this year in Germany is safe. That is the one thing I could do for you. You can use it without one fear that it isn't perfectly right. I shall meet everything dollar for dollar, and that is about all I can do. Then I shall go to work again, lower down on the ladder. I think I'll climb again, hope so, for your sake and the child's. It's not altogether my fault, though some things I've done I'd manage differently now. At any rate, I'm strong and I'm not old.

I think sometimes you've thought I did not love you. You said so once, a good many years ago, when I first began to get caught in the struggle for money. You haven't said so lately, and I've thought, maybe, you understood. A man works so hard to keep afloat that he can't even feel, sometimes. I couldn't seem to talk about it, someway, but I love you.

DAVID.

There were three words that had been written at the end and scratched out. Martha thought they might have made the sentence read, "I love you and need you." David had been too brave to let them stay. Her heart ached with longing to put her arms around him and comfort him. He might not welcome the demonstration, but it would be a very great satisfaction to her.

A moment of hot rebellion dried the tears that were very close to her eyelids now. Life was so queer in the way it treated women. They were never free to choose, but must take just whatever was sent of weal or woe.

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With a passionate longing to serve the two nearest and dearest to her, her impulse was always to go before and bear the brunt of the troubles that might beset their path; but Fate and their temperaments made her a mere follower, watching with troubled spirit as they met life in their own way.

She longed to be at home with David. His suffering would be, no doubt, of the old, inarticulate kind, but she wanted to be near him. After all David was her first love, her mate. His silences did not matter.

Of course, though, he was a man, and needed her less than did their little girl. The mother instinct to protect her child would keep her by the side of Hilda, who needed the musical training now more than ever.

She had just finished reading the letter for the dozenth time when a step sounded in the hall outside. The first set of doors opened into the corridor. While she waited for the instant to pass before the inner doors could open and reveal Hilda, one of those freakish, irrelevant thoughts that often come in troubled moments flashed through her mind: everything was arranged in twos in a German bedroom, two sets of windows, two sets of curtains, two beds, two bowls, two pairs of doors . . .

The mechanical enumeration was stopped

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by the entrance of Hilda, who came in with a springing step and an unusual animation in her face.

"Oh, Mother!" she cried, "what do you think! Herr Meyerbohm says I played the Mendelssohn Concerto with unusual expression. He was really civil, for once, so I know he must have meant it. He always says, you know, Mother, with the air of accusing me of something wrong, that my playing shows I have not lived. I can't think what he means by that."

Her mother looked at the lovely, stately girl, with her crown of golden hair, flushed face, and blue eyes, wide with the pleasure of unexpected commendation. She looked like a dream maiden to the eyes of the mother, who quite agreed with Herr Meyerbohm: Hilda never had lived. It had never been necessary for her to meet anything that was hard to bear, and Martha Ripley, with the blind eagerness of motherhood to stand between her child and any form of responsibility or care, had helped to make it impossible for Hilda to think often of anyone but self. Now she realized with a sinking heart that she could not do this any more. How little she had been able to prepare Hilda for what lay before her!

Hilda was waiting. She had always been

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persistent. Now she stood, without impatience, expecting her mother to elucidate the Herr Professor's cryptic remark.

"What do you think he means, Mother?" she repeated patiently.

"I think he means," her mother said, "that you have never suffered."

"But, Mother," Hilda protested, a rebellious look crossing her face, "must people suffer to live?"

"Yes, dear, they must. They must know love and happiness, and suffering and sorrow, before they really live."

"Why can't happiness teach them the meaning of life? Flowers bloom best in a perfect soil."

Hilda had not failed to have her secret girlish speculations about life; but, whenever the deeper significance of human experiences was broached, her face always took on this look of resistance. She seemed to grow remote, to let a veil fall over her eyes. Her mother had often thought that Hilda would have to meet the hard experiences that would surely come, in her own way; she could not do one thing to help her.

She was watching her daughter eagerly, looking for an opening for the news she had to tell; but Hilda was still busy with her own small triumphs and philosophies. If she had

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only noticed something unusual in the air and had asked a question to help along! Martha Ripley felt impatient in her distress. She forgot how successfully she had learned to conceal her own feelings, and she also forgot that the power to read joy or sorrow in another's face comes only with the life that Hilda had not lived.

"Hilda!"

Something in her mother's tone drew the girl's attention at last. She had been flitting about in unusual excitement, putting away her wraps and music, thinking about the Mendelssohn Concerto and the sayings of Herr Meyerbohm.

"What is it? A letter from Daddy?"

She came close to her mother, and reached out to take the letter. Her mother folded both hands over it, in her lap. The letter was hers — yet.

"Things have not been going well at home, Hilda."

"Is Father's rheumatism worse, or has his housekeeper left him?"

Hilda laughed a little. The idea of poor old Daddy with a housekeeper had, from the first, appealed to the rather heartless humor of the childishness that still clung to her in spite of her maturity. As yet, only surface trouble suggested itself to the girl,

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who had never had a glimpse of anything deeper.

It was natural that she should not think of the money question. She had never been wilfully wasteful, but had not thought much of the source of what she spent, any more than she would have stopped to analyze the air she breathed. The experience of counting the cost and of denying self had never been hers.

"No, dear, it is neither rheumatism nor his housekeeper." At the word 'housekeeper,' Martha Ripley winced. How could she have left David with a housekeeper, even for the sake of Hilda's music?

"It is Father's business. Things have gone badly and he has lost all his money."

She hurried it at the last, using words that were blunt in their simplicity. She closed her eyes for an instant, as though tired with her effort, but opened them again at once to catch each expression on the girl's face that might help her to know what to say next.

She had expected a startled look, at least; but there was no expression at all on Hilda's face. It was like a mask, beautiful and cold. To the mother's excited imagination she might have been Galatea returning to marble.

Martha Ripley could not tell whether

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Hilda failed to realize the import of what she had heard, or had retired into that remote region where she concealed her feelings. David was like that. When anything occurred to arouse deep feeling in David, he withdrew into an inner sanctuary, alone. It gave one the curious feeling that he was beyond reach, though right there in one's bodily presence. She had seen David do it so many times that she was used to it; but she never could grow reconciled to it with this child of hers, and had never ceased to feel, even while she controlled, the irritation of a deeply affectionate nature.

In sudden reaction she almost wanted to hurt the girl, her own baby, to shock her into some expression of feeling.

"Don't you *see*, Hilda, what it means? We shall be *poor*!"

She emphasized it almost savagely. A little frown was her only answer. Hilda continued to look straight at her, either failing to comprehend or disapproving of her mother's crude abruptness. Her dainty, cool fastidiousness was probably offended.

Martha felt that she could not stand it another minute. The limit of her endurance was reached. To be kept at arm's length by Hilda might have been bearable, if David had not shown that little glimpse of his real

feeling for her. That had shown her the weak point in the stoical attitude that she supposed she had attained. David, she was sure, was just beginning to realize how he loved her and needed her. She could not go to David, and now Hilda was standing there quietly shutting the door against her. She was sure she could not bear it.

It was not the loss of money that was breaking her heart. Life, to her, was interpreted only in the terms of the experiences that came to these two, and yet she was not to be allowed to help either one of them.

Reverting to the impulses of her youth, she broke into heavy, bitter weeping. Probably Hilda would despise her for it, but she could not help it and she no longer cared.

Hilda stepped nearer to her mother and took the letter. Still she did not speak a word. Martha Ripley made no protest. Perhaps, after all, Hilda had a right to the letter: she and her father were so exactly alike.

It took a long time for Hilda to read the letter, or possibly she read it many times. Her mother's weeping grew quieter. Presently Hilda stepped close, and put her hand under her mother's chin. Martha looked up apprehensively into the young face. There were no tears in the beautiful eyes, but there

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was something far better: an expression of understanding. The touch on the mother's face was very tender.

Martha Ripley waited breathlessly, afraid of dispelling the marvel by a single motion. Then a voice broke the stillness, and Martha noticed with a thrill that it had lost its childish sweetness, and was deeper and more melodious. Her heart beat fast as she realized with a feeling, half of joy and half of pain, that the child who had fascinated and irritated her by turns was gone, and in her place was a woman who could comprehend.

"Mother," said Hilda, "you must go home to Daddy."

"But, Hilda!" Martha gasped, "you've never been alone in your life."

"I can learn to be alone," said Hilda firmly, "and Frau Schmidt will see that no harm comes to me here. I will stay because you and Daddy have planned it so; but you must go home to him."

It seemed strange to have Hilda take command, but Martha did not resent it. Underneath all her impatience at being unable to understand Hilda had lain 'a deep respect for the girl's ability. Now the thought of leaving her beautiful child, alone here in a strange country, did not seem at all impossible. She was comforted.

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"You see," Hilda went on to explain carefully, as though the thought could not have occurred to her mother yet, "I shall need to use my music now. Perhaps Herr Meyer-bohm will think I have begun to live."

Her mother looked up at the tall, straight young figure, and then yielded again to a sudden impulse. She stretched her arms up and the girl went straight into them.

At last she had begun to understand. Martha Ripley felt the joy that may go hand in hand with sorrow. She was going home to David, her old David, and yet different,—no longer self-sufficient, reserved and cold, but newly aware of his need of her. In a year Hilda would come home, to be the greatest pleasure in their lives. Martha Ripley stood on the threshold of a new life, but the hardships ahead had little terror for her in the light of this new revelation of courage and tenderness.

FOLLOWING THE GLEAM

Following the Gleam



INTER was a poet. He kept the fact carefully concealed from the captious public, and firmly turned to the world the brazen front of journalism. This concealment preyed upon his soul, for it bespoke a worldly wisdom and an instinct of self-preservation that convinced even him, at times, that he was not a poet, after all. Who ever heard of a poet with the impulse to hide his growing-pains, until his full stature was attained? His caution seemed to antagonize his muse, who, in revenge for his failure to do open homage, lured him relentlessly on, yet kept herself always just beyond his reach.

One morning Winter set out upon a long tramp, shamelessly glad that a pot-boiler had that very morning furnished him with the excuse for present dalliance. He left his kindly importunate mother to think what she chose, that he had to see a fellow on business, that he was off to gather material, that he wanted merely to stretch his muscles, tired from overmuch stirring of the pot. He himself knew that he was merely throwing dull duty to the winds. He was off to follow the gleam.

Following the Gleam

Time was short. There would not be many more of these golden days. The winter season of dignified dullness was almost upon him. When that came he would settle down to feed the fire, that boiled the pot, that made the broth, that fed the family . . . How endlessly dreary it all was; but how insistently human and compelling. Now, while the seductiveness of Nature held him grippingly, he would have one whole day, all his own, to feed his senses and light his soul, with no thought of duty to intrude upon his delight. At last he was out in the poet's world — the brown and golden, green and russet world — with care left behind, scorned, ignored, forgotten.

He lent himself completely to the happy illusion that, just ahead, behind this flaming tree, in yonder misty bush, at the turn of the road, at the bend of that bank, topped with scarlet vines and low-growing sumach bushes, he should find her whom he sought, the muse of his fondest dream. He fancied she was flying before his determined advance, now luring him on with every riotous burst of color, now attempting to check his pursuit with the timid dart of furry creature across his path.

He laughed, and accommodately threw acorns at the rabbits and ground-squirrels,

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or listened, as if in recognition of some pretty trick, to every gay burst of song. But he tramped on more smartly, with head thrown up and blood atingle. It was a goodly game. Even pot-boiling had not been able to dampen the poetic ardor in him. He was glad. Life was well worth living — when he was all poet.

A sudden burst of song from a tree all gleaming with golden leaves decided him at last to stay his feet, to rest, to give her whom he pursued new chance to think up allurements and checks for his further delectation.

A sandwich would not be amiss. Even a poet can get hungry. In pleased appreciation of all that his world of the present hour had to offer him, he settled back against the tree trunk and set his teeth in some of old Becky's good bread and butter.

The taste of good food, the feel of old corduroy, the pleasant contrast of its soft brown with the glowing yellow of tree and carpeted earth, the knowledge of that sizable check in the pouch at his side and of poetic feeling in his soul — these were all that he could ask. And he rested, well content.

Overhead stretched the bluest of blue skies, and the fleeciest of clouds, broken here and there by a great flock of birds flying southward. Clumps of deep red, dull gold, or

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still glossy trees bordered the winding road as far as eye could reach. His glance flitted from group to group in critical, selective enjoyment. All at once, far down the dusty, sunny road, he saw a little curl of dull gray smoke.

Queer he hadn't noticed it before; but then it was such an inconspicuous little curl. Something rather pathetic about it drew him irresistibly toward it. Perhaps this was some new charm. Possibly this way lay some new attraction. He was inclined to go and see.

The small curl grew no larger as he advanced toward it down the road. It looked a little ghostly and mysterious as it rose half-heartedly from among the trees.

It must come from a house, but no house appeared until he was almost upon it. Then it started into being, apparently in as ghostly a fashion as had the smoke that announced its presence. There it was, set well back among the shadows thrown by old, old maples. It was mellowed by time to the softest of wood colors that blent harmoniously with the tree trunks. It had the air of belonging to another time and of desiring to avoid attention by fostering its air of dimness and dullness.

Pottering about the shabby lawn was a

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shabby figure, making a futile effort to stay the hand of time, and retard the inevitable decay.

Every outline of the house and its surroundings, with the figure moving almost imperceptibly from spot to spot, would have attracted the eye of an artist; but it repelled Winter, in his present mood. With unerring instinct he looked for the spot of life and love that must be keeping this dimness from fading quite away.

At the back of the house and a little to the left was a garden, all a wonderful mass of late autumn flowers, yellow flowers of every shape, every kind, and every size. In the midst of them all was a girl, whose uncovered head the sun was trying to turn to as pure a gold as that of the surrounding flowers.

It was not to be done, however, for the sun-kissed crest of each wave deepened to a rich brown in the shadows. When Winter could take his eyes from the brightness of flowers and face, he saw that the rich tints were repeated throughout the entire figure. Deep green and russet and brown were blent, with here and there the splash of gold to match her hair, and even in her eyes seemed to have been dropped some of the brilliant flecks from the flowers that caressed her hands, brushed her shoulders, and overtopped

her head. He could no more have dwelt upon her shabbiness than he could have noticed the curled edge of some lovely fallen leaf, for she turned upon him such an innocent, friendly look that his heart gave a leap under his sturdy Norfolk jacket.

She did not speak, and Winter did not miss the unspoken words, for her smile was a welcome, her gesture an invitation, her nod an assurance of her pleasure in this meeting. They did not need to talk.

She picked for him great bunches of her flowers, and as she picked Winter's eyes roved from flowers to figure, and from figure to dull domestic setting. It was all pitifully plain, this picture of decay and dreariness, with its sharply contrasting side of youth and loveliness.

Up there, at the dull old house, was probably a dull old figure, waiting for the final summons; down here in the garden was the very incarnation of youth, with its unfulfilled promise; between the two, on the shabby lawn, was the feeble link that kept the two extremes together.

With a start Winter's eyes focused themselves on this shabby figure, which had as yet made no distinct impression on him. It was bending awkwardly over something on the ground. As the man straightened his bent

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figure he dropped something, and Winter saw that it was his serviceable pouch, dropped in his advance to meet the girl in the garden.

With a few strides he reached it where it lay, gaping open, a thing deprived of its purpose, robbed and despoiled. His letter was gone; so was the spell that had bound him in this place of seductive mystery.

With the pouch dangling from his hand, and his blood tingling with anger, his eye followed the old figure scuttling across the lawn, with furtiveness showing in every awkward line.

He understood perfectly. The convenience of the old pouch; the possibility of its containing money; the needs of this broken household; and its utter dependence on the flabby and futile efforts of the old servant: all these had conspired against a somewhat rudimentary moral nature. An equally rudimentary intelligence had not grasped the fact that an unsigned piece of paper was useless.

Perhaps the girl had been in the scheme. Perhaps the golden moments in the garden had all been planned for a purpose. Perhaps . . . !

Oh, it was all too ghastly! Yet the thought would not depart as quickly as it had come. Primitive man was aroused in

the defense of his own; the soul of the poet was for the moment asleep.

With accusation in his eyes he turned abruptly upon the girl, who was close behind him. Her eyes were fixed upon him, and the look of horror and repudiation in them sent primitive man to the right-about. The soul of the poet awoke.

With no other thought but to protect her from this thing that had happened he held out both arms to her without a word. She should not be touched by humiliation. He would guard her even from her own thoughts.

To his horror, she retreated from him, slowly at first, but more swiftly as he advanced. Her hands were outstretched,—but with palms turned out. She was rejecting what he would offer, and her eyes were filled with an unutterable sadness that sent a chill to his heart.

With a cry he threw himself toward her, to kneel at her feet, to beg her for forgiveness of his one unworthy suspicion, to offer her a lifetime of reparation. His precipitancy checked her for a moment, and the look of sadness left her eyes. In its place, grew a love-light. Winter's heart beat to bursting. He knew in this instant that all his life long he had been waiting just for this.

With the sweetest gesture in the world she

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turned her hands slowly, with the palms up. Her arms were stretched out to him in forgiveness and acceptance — and then she vanished.

Winter found himself under the great tree, with the cardinal overhead, and a saucy little squirrel stowing away a nut in an impudent cheek; with the soft carpet of yellow leaves stretching as far as eye could reach; and with the warm sunshine pouring down upon him and dazzling his eyes.

There was no garden, no girl, no shambling figure, no curling smoke. It had all been a dream, and Winter started to his feet with a sob in his throat. It was all so real; the girl was so beautiful; he wanted her so that his heart ached to bursting.

Then the unconquerable poet soul triumphed. Wanted her? Well! Was she not there in his heart? Would he ever again be without her? He had only to shut his eyes to see her in all her loveliness with outstretched arms.

She would be his in his waking moments; she would come to bless his dreams again; she would keep his soul alight, for he had followed and found the gleam.

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